PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING FOR THE INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER IN PRE-KINDERGARTEN: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Melinda K. Parsons-Shadid

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University

2024

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING FOR THE INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER IN PRE-KINDERGARTEN URBAN CLASSROOMS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by Melinda K. Parsons-Shadid

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

2024

APPROVED BY:

Heather Strafaccia, EdD, Committee Chair

Benjamin Tickle, PhD, Committee Member

Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences utilizing professional resources to aid in the early childhood education development of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder for teachers at charter schools in a large city in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The problem is that there are limited professional resources to reduce early childhood education teachers' ability to educate students diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder within the general classroom. One central research question and three sub-questions explored the purpose and problem of this study, which were guided by social cognitive theory. The central research question of this study was: How do early childhood education teachers describe their experiences utilizing supportive resources within the general classroom to aid in the academic development of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder? The study's focus was examined through a hermeneutic phenomenological design using one-on-one interviews, a focus group, and observations. Following data collection, the transcription of teacher participant experiences was analyzed for themes and sub-themes to answer the study's research questions. The study's findings concluded that special and general education teachers and paraprofessionals do not feel supported within the inclusion classroom. The lack of support is described through the perceptions of the lack of professional development and training available within the school. Specifically, veteran special education teachers felt that they were not aware of the latest resources and strategies to assist students with autism spectrum disorder.

Keywords: autism spectrum disorder, professional development, student performance, teacher performance, efficacy, early childhood

Copyright Page

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to GOD for giving me the strength and wisdom to complete it and to get this far in my educational journey.

I dedicate this to my husband, Bady, who was my shoulder to cry on when I felt defeated and gave me so much support, love, and help. I love you.

My two sons, Liam and Luka: Thank you for supporting me and being the guiding light for Mommy.

To the Brittain, Ewers, Parsons, and Shadid Family for always supporting and giving me words of wisdom so I never give up. Thank you for pushing me to greatness.

To the memory of my father, Richard S. Parsons, thank you for always guiding and supporting me throughout my entire life.

Acknowledgments

Dr. Heather Strafaccia and Dr. Benjamin Tickle

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

List of Abbreviations

Applied Behavior Analyst (ABA)

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Early Childhood Education (ECE)

Developmental Delay (DD)

Individual Education Plan (IEP)

Intellectual Disability (ID)

Professional Development (PD)

Performance Intervention Plan (PIP)

Special Education Coordinator (SEC)

Theory of the Mind (ToM)

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The stigma of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) has drastically changed in the United States public school system in the past seventy years (Evans, 2014). Researchers have shown a positive correlation between students with ASD who perform well academically and socially in an inclusive classroom model (Jury et al., 2021). Such evidence aligns with the idea that mainstream education now expects general and special education teachers and paraprofessionals to understand the intricacies of ASD and how to teach students with such a diagnosis (Kirkham, 2017). This chapter will explore the background of ASD and the problem within the school setting. The problem is that limited professional resources reduce early childhood education teachers' ability to educate within the general classroom students diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the experiences utilizing professional resources to aid in the development of early childhood education of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder for teachers at charter schools in the Washington D.C. area. A series of definitions will also be provided to help the reader understand the language within this study and the different abbreviations used with students who receive special education support.

Background

This section will focus on the historical, social, and theoretical theories of ASD and how ASD has evolved rapidly throughout grades K-12 to be more equitable for students within the inclusion setting (Jury et al., 2021). ASD has various characteristics that can interfere with behavior, communication, social, and cognitive ability. There are many new techniques to help students with ASD succeed within the academic setting. However, student success comes with

intensive training for teachers and paraprofessionals during professional development, as a greater understanding of ASD has developed over the years.

Historical Context

ASD has taken many leaps during the last few centuries. Historically, many assumptions were made about students with ASD that kept learners away from fulfilling education and social skills in and outside the classroom (Evans, 2014). Students could not access the same classes as other general education students, such as physical education, art, and other extracurricular activities that other general education scholars could access (Accardo & Finnegan, 2019). Students on the autism spectrum were often cast out of public schools or taken to a different room, away from their general education peers, secluded on another side of the school building (Tan & Thorius, 2019). Students with ASD also could not access the same work and curriculum as their peers and would often not be given rigorous work because it was thought that students with ASD were not as academically capable as the rest of their general education peers (Evans, 2014).

Young students with ASD in early education were considered to have inappropriate behavior. Students in special education programs were often separated from their non-disabled peers because they did not know how to regulate their emotions or use verbal skills (Al Jaffal, 2022). In addition, students with ASD were not given any successful intervention to help with social and emotional learning, life skills, and different academic areas (Gunderson et al., 2017). Further, students with ASD were also labeled unintelligent or unable to function in society (Evans, 2014). Teachers and other staff for students with ASD, as well as other disabilities, have also lacked education and proper teaching techniques to fit the unique needs of ASD (Bolourian et al., 2021). In fact, teachers sometimes used aggressive measures to discipline children with

ASD, which may have involved teachers putting students into small spaces when the student had a trigger (Gilmour & Wehby, 2020). During the 20th century, this response was considered normal worldwide and effective when students with ASD were considered uncontrollable (Kirkham, 2017). Students with ASD were also regarded as dangerous to themselves and their peers, so students with ASD would be in different placements than their general education peers (Kirkham, 2017).

Education for students with ASD has become more positive and more productive. Instead of students with ASD being cast out, students are now being invited and included in the classroom with their general education peers (Odom, 2019). Evidence-based studies show that students with ASD have more educational gains than students in a separate setting. Social skills and cues have also increased significantly for students with moderate to high-functioning ASD in the general education setting (Levy et al., 2009). In an ideal mainstream classroom, there are often two teachers: one general education teacher and a special education teacher (Levy et al., 2009; Tekin-Iftar et al., 2017).

Mainstream classrooms use the inclusion style model to help students with and without disabilities. Even though there have been many great leaps in education for students with ASD, changes and modifications still need to be made. There remains a negative stigma with students with ASD that educators and other staff members may have. There are still many barriers that students with ASD face daily within the school building due to many stigmas that still exist in our society (Levy et al., 2009). Many obstacles still include teachers not feeling comfortable teaching students with ASD due to potentially low academics and inconsistent behaviors (Levy et al., 2009). Teachers may also not know how to modify assignments and accommodate

students with ASD. Overall, education for students with ASD has advanced through the centuries and allowed students with ASD to thrive academically and socially in and out of the classroom.

Social Context

More evidence and data have been provided in modern education to support the inclusion model for students with ASD. Students with ASD deserve and require an equitable and rigorous education as their non-disabled peers. As researchers move forward, it is shown in different state assessments that students with ASD may score high in math, reading, and written expression Balaz et al., 2022). The state assessments indicate that students can learn grade-level curriculum but may need to be taught in a scaffolded way (Zakai-Mashiach et al., 2021).

Students with disabilities need access to free and appropriate public education (FAPE) to ensure academic learning (2017). FAPE (2017) is also provided under the provisions of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (Rozalski et al., 2021). These acts and regulations galvanize the need for special education and make it lawful that education needs to be equitable for all students with disabilities. More research has been completed on how to teach students with ASD positively and productively, integrating students within the classroom. Before this time, students with disabilities were treated unfairly and sometimes degradingly by teachers, peers, and even doctors. As a result, students with ASD were not allowed to have a successful and full life (Zirkel, 2017).

Students with mild functioning ASD have become more involved and engaged with special and general education teachers in the classroom because more interventions have been implemented in early childhood education classrooms to assist students with academic success (McKenna et al., 2019). Evidence-based research has demonstrated more positive results that

support students with mild functioning ASD within the inclusive classroom with their non-disabled peers (McKenna et al., 2019).

Another area of success is students with moderate to high-functioning ASD working with peers and the school community, gaining more substantial social involvement and positive interactions (Odom et al., 2018). These interactions may help students with mild functioning ASD in the future. Such social involvement and positive interactions may decrease inappropriate behavior and triggers because the students with mild functioning ASD will be familiar with a social setting. Such inclusion also may allow students with ASD to understand how to develop relationships that will help them in the future, such as attending college, developing a career, and maintaining other interpersonal relationships (Odom et al., 2018).

Theoretical Context

There has been a focus on how the inclusion setting is practical in early elementary education with students diagnosed with ASD (Sulek et al., 2021). The social cognitive theory allows researchers to understand better how an individual learns by considering culture, knowledge development, knowledge dissemination, and educational practice procedures (Bandura, 1986; Sulek et al., 2021). The study also focused on strategies to be used within the classroom to better assist teachers and students in a mainstream early childhood education classroom through the lens of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) that focuses on environmental, individual, and behavioral factors (Wang & Lin, 2021).

Another theory used to explain young students in education is the theory of mind (ToM) (Premack & Woodruff, 1978). The ToM (Premack & Woodruff, 1978) theorizes the ability to understand one's thoughts, beliefs, and desires. It is shown that typical students at three to four years of age become aware of people and other children around them (Zakai-Mashiach et al.,

2021). Young preschoolers are also becoming more aware of their own emotions and those of others (Zakai-Mashiach et al., 2021). Students with developmental delays or who have been diagnosed with ASD may struggle to socialize with others. This may cause students who have ASD to play away from their peers or not engage with others (Zakai-Mashiach et al., 2021). ToM (Premack & Woodruff, 1978) uses the five-task theory mind scale to assess preschool students, explaining some characteristics of social behaviors that a person identified with ASD may struggle with in learning (Fletcher et al., 2014). While ToM (1978) offers such perspectives, social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) was chosen to examine the lived experiences and behaviors of educators who utilize professional resources to support the students diagnosed with ASD learning to gain further insight into the participants' behaviors within their classrooms.

Problem Statement

The problem is that limited professional resources reduce early childhood education teachers' ability to educate within the general classroom students diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. There has been so much stigma around students with ASD that general education teachers do not feel supported when teaching students with ASD (Francisco et al., 2020). There are many professional development programs to help teachers, administration, parents, and school districts. Still, professional development will come at a price that schools may not have the funds to provide, especially in the urban setting (Suhrheinrich et al., 2021). Many studies show that inclusive classrooms benefit students with ASD (Hume et al., 2019). Collaborative teaching allows general and special education teachers to support students within the inclusion setting in academics, social-emotional learning, and life skills (Ho et al., 2018). Many teachers do not have the proper professional development to serve students at such an early age (Finlay et al., 2019).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of utilizing professional resources to aid in the early childhood education development of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder for teachers at charter schools in a large city in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. At this stage in the research, professional resources aid in the development of early childhood education of children diagnosed with ASD (Able et al., 2015). Professional developments are defined as educational systems developed to guide the exploration of educational experiences to assist with student development within and outside of the classroom (Able et al., 2015; Aylward & Neilsen-Hewett, 2021; Peterson & Bloom, 2020; 2021). The theory guiding this study is Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, from which the theory's three factors, the person, the behavior, and the environment, are integrated into the sub-questions to explore the theory's application to the study topic fully.

Significance of the Study

This study focuses on the early education of students with ASD when behaviors are more elevated, students are identified for early interventions, and possible diagnoses can be made (Sanz-Cervera & Tárraga-Mínguez, 2021). Young children do not know how to understand and regulate emotions; this can be extremely hard on the general education teacher, who can be at a loss regarding techniques to help regulate students with ASD emotions and academics (Sanz-Cervera & Tárraga-Mínguez, 2021). This study's theoretical, empirical, and practical significance is examined.

Theoretical

The theoretical significance of this study will allow a focus on how limited professional resources may reduce early childhood education teachers' ability to educate students diagnosed

with ASD within the general classroom. This study will focus on why limited and inadequate professional development is perilous to teachers who teach students with ASD within the prekindergarten inclusion setting. Without proper professional development and funding, general and inclusion teachers may feel defeated and overwhelmed when teaching students with ASD in the classroom. Without support, general and special education teachers may feel at a loss when understanding new ways to assist students with ASD academically and behaviorally within the preschool setting. Examining the experiences of early childhood educators utilizing supportive resources in the general classroom to aid in the academic development of children diagnosed with ASD will further contribute to the theoretical underpinnings of the study by expanding upon Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory. The theory will be expanded upon by applying the cognitive, social, and behavioral factors encompassed within the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) to describe the educators' decisions to produce robust learning environments for their students.

Empirical

Empirically, utilizing a qualitative phenomenological design allows me to explore the perspectives of educators who teach students with ASD in an inclusive classroom. Using the phenomenological method will allow me to develop a close relationship with the participants as co-researchers of the study to add the lived experiences of my participants to the qualitative body of knowledge (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A rich description of the educator participants' experiences will offer a new perspective on the experienced utilization of professional development resources phenomenon in the early childhood classroom in a densely populated urban setting where resources can be limited. Fewer resources interfere with the quality of professional development and other training for general education teachers (Reese et al., 2018).

Since urban schoolteachers often experience more student behavioral issues within the classroom, a higher turnover rate may be experienced, potentially limiting the effectiveness of professional development training (McKenna et al., 2019).

Practical

Practically, I will explore how teachers access professional development training to support self-efficacy in teaching within inclusive settings and their attitudes toward such programming. Training can include evidence-based practices to help with leadership support, structure, collaboration, and different evidence-based instructions to help students with mild to high-functioning ASD within the pre-kindergarten inclusion classroom. Allowing educators to share their experiences will enable them to discuss their perspectives on developing an inclusive classroom while adding to the body of knowledge. In doing so, the study may guide participants toward additional opportunities to create a more robust support system for student success in an inclusive classroom.

Research Questions

The research questions are guided by the problem and purpose of this study to describe the experiences utilizing professional resources to aid in the development of early childhood education of children diagnosed with ASD for teachers at charter schools. Further, the research questions specifically align with the components of the theoretical framework. Elements of Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory focus on the person, the behavior, and the environment.

Central Research Question

How do early childhood education teachers describe their experiences utilizing supportive resources within the general classroom to aid in the academic development of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder?

Sub-Question One

How do early childhood education teachers describe their self-efficacy in teaching children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder in the general classroom?

Sub-Question Two

How do early childhood education teachers describe their access to professional development opportunities that aid in the academic development of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder in the general classroom?

Sub-Question Three

How do early childhood education teachers describe the attitudes surrounding supportive resources in teaching children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder in the general classroom?

Definitions

1. *Autism spectrum disorder* – Autism spectrum disorder is a social communication disorder that has been increasing in global prevalence, with the most current statistics estimating 1 in 54 children to be affected (Kisbu-Sakarya & Doenyas, 2021). There are also social difficulties individuals with ASD experience; many of them can manifest language and communication problems, struggle with following and learning from an unmodified curriculum, and have atypical behaviors.
2. *Free Appropriate Public Education* - A law requiring public schools to provide appropriate education and modifications, aides, and related services free of charge to students with disabilities, including their parents or guardians (United States Department of Education, 2020).

3. *Inclusion* – Inclusion is a space for general and special education students to learn and be socially accepted by peers (Juvonen et al., 2019).
4. *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* - This law provides free appropriate education for eligible children with disabilities throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services for those children (United States Department of Education, 2020).
5. *High-Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder* - An individual with social, linguistic, and cognitive abilities and needs little to no assistance (Huang et al., 2023).
6. *Low-Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder* - An individual who displays the most severe symptoms of autism (Huang et al., 2023).
7. *Moderate-Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder* - An individual who needs assistance in social, linguistic, and cognitive abilities and additional support (Huang et al., 2023).
8. *Social Cognitive Theory* - Behavior is determined by the interactions of a triad of variables, including personal factors, environmental factors, and behavior (Bandura, 1986, 2002).

Summary

Mainstream education expects teachers and paraprofessionals to understand how to instruct students with ASD (Balaz et al., 2022). Evidence has shown a positive correlation between students with ASD who perform well academically and socially when there is an inclusive model in the classroom (Gómez-Marí et al., 2021). This chapter explored the background of education and ASD through historical, social, and theoretical contexts. Following the background examination, the problem was identified. The problem is that limited professional resources reduce early childhood education teachers' ability to educate within the

general classroom students diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the experiences of utilizing professional resources to aid in the early childhood education development of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder for teachers at charter schools in a large city in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Finally, the chapter concluded with terms and definitions associated with this study to guide clarity for the reader.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A systematic review of the literature exploring the inclusive classroom setting for general and special education teachers was conducted. Professional development training for general and special education teachers is critical for supporting students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and student success inside and outside the classroom (Able et al., 2015). Often, teachers struggle to provide a rigorous education for moderate to high-function students with ASD (Miled, 2019). Thus, the lack of professional development engagements may limit access to grade-level curriculum within the inclusive classroom (Miled, 2019). A gap in the research surrounding early childhood education inclusive classrooms and professional development support for teachers has been identified by examining the literature (Teo et al., 2022), creating a significant need for this study. This chapter will focus on the theoretical framework and the related literature to provide a foundation for examining the inclusive classroom setting for general and special education teachers. The literature review aims to develop an understanding of rigorous and valuable professional development experiences for teachers who serve students with ASD within the inclusion classroom.

Theoretical Framework

Albert Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory (SCT) will guide the examination of professional development utilization among teachers who educate in an inclusive classroom. The SCT approach focuses on the social context of a person's interaction due to the person's environment, individual, and behavior (Bandura, 1986; Moreno-Sandoval et al., 2021). SCT distinguishes between three modes of agency: direct personal agency, a proxy agency, which relies on others to act, and collective agency, which is conducted through group action (Bandura,

1986, 2000). SCT also explains how behavior can determine a person's success through the environment (Bandura, 1986). The environmental process closely aligns with students and teachers because a person will naturally align with their community and its behavioral norms (Moreno-Sandoval et al., 2021). Concepts of the social cognitive theory will allow observational learning, modeling, positive reinforcements, and self-efficacy in the realm of education (Bandura, 1986; Moreno-Sandoval et al., 2021).

Students with moderate to high-functioning ASD may have behaviors that some teachers can sometimes consider extreme and unsafe (Sanz-Cervera & Tárraga-Mínguez, 2021). Students with moderate to high-functioning ASD may also lack the appropriate and necessary learning environment due to the lack of teacher professional development, training, and other support from the school. These factors may contribute tremendously to increased negative classroom behaviors regarding students with moderate to high-functioning ASD. Thus, examining the person, behavior, and environmental factors (Bandura, 1986) associated with utilizing professional development training will support developing knowledge toward social interaction among students and educators by providing clear instructions, showing desired behaviors, and giving positive reinforcement (Moreno-Sandoval et al., 2021).

SCT (Bandura, 1986) integrates well with this qualitative study exploring teacher utilization of professional development resources to educate students with ASD because the theory explores the nature of teacher behaviors. If educators are more intrigued to participate in professional development training, students may benefit from the educator's newly developed knowledge. Even further, educators of inclusive classrooms who participate in ASD professional development training may be better equipped to support the needs of students diagnosed with ASD. Thus, considering the personal, behavioral, and environmental factors that guide the

decision to participate in professional development will support a more robust understanding of what best aids the educational experiences of both educators and students. Overall, this theory will guide the exploration of teacher behavior through the person, behavior, and environment (Bandura, 1986) within an inclusive classroom, applying professional development resources to aid in the education of students with ASD.

Related Literature

Support for students with moderate to high-functioning ASD within the prekindergarten inclusion setting is lacking in education and research studies. Teachers and students benefit from professional development programming regardless of the time a teacher has worked in the field (Stahmer et al., 2018). While scholars have examined the support for students with moderate to high-functioning ASD and their needs for succeeding academically (Anderson et al., 2021), there are few studies on the success of students with ASD within the inclusion setting with general education teachers and peers. Even further, students with ASD benefit significantly from inclusive educational settings as they work alongside their non-disabled peers (Gee & Gonsier-Gerdin, 2018).

A self-contained classroom environment may be especially harmful for students with ASD to develop socialization skills, potentially resulting in lower self-esteem when communicating with peers and adults. Thus, students with ASD will benefit from an inclusive classroom beyond academics and supporting social and emotional milestone growth (Gee & Gonsier-Gerdin, 2018). This literature review will explore the inclusion classroom, early childhood education and autism spectrum disorder, professional development and autism spectrum disorder, quality of professional development in urban areas, teacher self-efficacy with assistive technologies, and a gap in the literature which has shown only a few studies on the

success of students with ASD within the inclusion setting with general education teachers and peers.

Inclusive Classrooms

Inclusive classrooms are settings within the school where students with and without disabilities are in the same classroom (Zakai-Mashiach et al., 2021). Students with moderate to high-functioning ASD can be affected both socially and academically within the inclusion classroom. Students with ASD often lack social skills, which can hinder social learning at a young age (Markodimitraki et al., 2017). As education continues evolving and new evidence-based techniques are developed to assist students with ASD, school districts must frequently stay ahead of changes, informing and educating teachers with training and other professional developments. For example, the inclusion setting is a modern way to help students with disabilities, especially students with moderate to high-functioning ASD, to increase high-quality education, peer collaboration, and positive social and emotional growth (Francisco et al., 2020).

In the past 20 years, the inclusion of the classroom has positively influenced students with disabilities (Yu & Cho, 2021). However, the perception may still be complex for early childhood general education teachers. A stigma still makes the inclusion setting challenging when working with students with moderate to high-functioning ASD, which can include isolation and exclusion, lack of acceptance, and potentially, bullying (Odom, 2019). A teacher's way of thinking may positively or negatively influence their attitude within the classroom. Giving educators a positive outlook on teaching includes high-quality professional development, leadership support, and training to keep inclusion classrooms rigorous for students with ASD (Yu & Cho, 2021). A teacher’s efficacy is critically important within the school because the

students are influenced when teachers lack knowledge or may be unsure of tools to assist students better (Odom, 2019; Yu & Cho, 2021).

General education teachers working with students with moderate to high-functioning ASD may experience different emotions while working in the inclusive classroom compared to working outside an inclusion classroom due to the high levels of uncertainty teachers experience (Bolourian et al., 2021). Such uncertainty may be due to discomfort, limited technology, lack of resources, and deficiencies in the knowledge of evidence-based practices to instruct students with moderate to high-functioning ASD (Bolourian et al., 2021). Teachers who work with students on relationship building and understanding the student have a much easier time than teachers who do not build relationships with students (Bolourian et al., 2021). Even though special and general education teachers understand the importance of the inclusion setting, available general education teachers still seem to be more distant from students with exceptionalities (Bolourian et al., 2021).

Adapting different teaching approaches is critically important when working with students with moderate to high-functioning ASD and all students with disabilities to combat hesitations among educators (Van Der Steen et al., 2020). Teachers need a different mindset and adaptability when working with students with disabilities (Van Der Steen et al., 2020). Unfortunately, students with moderate to high-functioning ASD are shown to have lower levels of achievement than their non-disabled peers (Van Der Steen et al., 2020). Schools and inclusion teachers should understand how to help students with ASD as they navigate goals inside and outside the classroom. There are many areas where students with moderate to high-functioning ASD may need assistance, such as socialization, comprehension, communication, reading, writing, and mathematics (Van Der Steen et al., 2020). Interestingly, when teachers are more

experienced with various classroom teaching strategies, educators exhibit more confidence when working with students with moderate to high-functioning ASD (Van Der Steen et al., 2020). Experienced teachers also understand the importance of integrating students with ASD and the general population (Van Der Steen et al., 2020). Growth within the academic realm may also allow teachers to assist students with ASD within the classroom, more notably because the teacher has different strategies to utilize.

A variety of strategies may support positive peer-to-peer connections. Having nondisabled peers understand their classmates with ASD is essential when socializing (Van Der Steen et al., 2020). When educators read books and social stories that focus on reinforcing, respectful play, and sensory engagement, students without ASD are more empathetic towards their peers with ASD (Balaz et al., 2020). Allowing more social interaction and understanding between peers with ASD and non-disabled peers can allow collaboration and for students with ASD to feel included in the classroom (Balaz et al., 2020; Van Der Steen et al., 2020). Ensuring that students with ASD are included within the classroom may be especially effective in socialization and behavior.

Physical education inclusion classes focusing on play, practice, and physical activity also encourage student participation (Lee et al., 2022). With the inclusion of the classroom and the use of cooperative play and modeling positive practices, students with ASD often participate more than those in classrooms without such activities (Balaz et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2022). Further, since students with ASD often have difficulty holding eye contact, the perception of distant attitudes is prevalent (Bolourian et al., 2021; 2022). Alternatively, students in an inclusion classroom who worked on eye contact with peers and sought a partner had higher levels of increased eye contact and social connection (Lynch et al., 2023). While classroom

activities can guide and support behavioral changes among students with ASD and without, not all behaviors are changed. For example, students with ASD may not mimic what they see; thus, modeling may or may not support correct responses to requests and directions (Sparapani et al., 2022). However, while some studies find this to be consistent among students with ASD, not all studies align with the lack of direction and modeling perspective to be lacking among such students (Bolourian et al., 2021; 2022).

Early Childhood Education and Autism Spectrum Disorder

During the early ages of a child, the signs of ASD, such as a lack of following directions, may begin to show within the early childhood classroom (Aylward & Neilsen-Hewett, 202l). Most preschool classrooms develop learning techniques through playing to assist young students with social, emotional, and behavioral goals (Aylward & Neilsen-Hewett, 2021). However, young preschool students with ASD may have more difficulty playing in school (Markodimitraki et al., 2017) due to a lack of social interaction, not playing well with a peer, and not being interested in toys (Markodimitraki et al., 2017). Young students with ASD may focus more on manipulating objects and be aggressive toward others when the students do not want to do a specific activity. In the holistic approach involving family and environmental factors, adults need to learn the supporting role of serving as a guide rather than being directive (Markodimitraki et al., 2017). Such evidence supports the theory that students benefit from play rather than in a formal classroom, where teachers direct (Markodimitraki et al., 2017).

Mainstream education is often supported by evidence-based practice. It benefits veteran and novice teachers' professional development and training, especially when working with students with ASD (Aylward & Neilsen-Hewett, 2021; Markodimitraki et al., 2017). Similarly, in early childhood settings, professional development may be beneficial when assisting teachers

in educating students with ASD. Professional development helps teachers by providing new and guiding resources for educators to support all students (Markdodimitraki et al., 2017). Still, it is especially beneficial for educators who teach students with ASD (Markodimitraki et al., 2017). Educators may learn new models to guide students emotional, social, and behavioral health. For example, the early start Denver model is based on behavior, health, and social skills by learning through play and can be exposed to teachers in a professional development setting for classroom use (Aylward & Neilsen-Hewett, 2021). Since the use of evidence-based practices is considered the best way to inform teachers of new techniques for the behaviors of students with ASD within the early education classroom (Aylward & Neilsen-Hewett, 2021), teachers may feel more efficacious when informed of new practices through evidence-based systems to support all types of students with social, emotional, and behavioral health skills (Aylward & Neilsen-Hewett, 2021; Markodimitraki et al., 2017).

The social skills of students with ASD are critically important when learning in education (Vygotsky, 1943), mainly because ASD has a large spectrum, and various children can be on different portions of the spectrum with multiple levels of social ability (Lai et al., 2014). Moderate to high-functioning students may be more accepted by their peers and the school community than low to mid-functioning students due to their ability to communicate and understand more social cues amongst peers (Myburgh et al., 2020). Even further, students being on different parts of the spectrum can cause difficulties if a student is non-verbal and lacks facial expressions regarding emotions (Myburgh et al., 2020). Due to the many significant challenges of having students with ASD within the inclusion classroom, it may be beneficial for teachers to be trained in different strategies to better assist students within the academic setting (Aylward & Neilsen-Hewett, 2021; Myburgh et al., 2020; Saade, 2021).

Vygotsky (1934) emphasized the roles of teachers and students in the learning and development process, which encourages teachers to scaffold critical skills from a lower to a higher skill set (Myburgh et al., 2020). Teachers who have worked with high-functioning students with ASD may have recognized the three processing methods (Myburgh et al., 2020). The first processing method is socializing amongst peers, the second method is socializing on an individual level, and the third method of processing is individual socialization mastery (Myburgh et al., 2020). Teachers can use the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky,1934) to help students with ASD become more sociable and develop relationships within the classroom (Myburgh et al., 2020). Increased socialization levels also allow teachers to assist students in becoming more independent and relying more on collaboration with other students within the space (Myburgh et al., 2020). Using this method allows teachers to identify what a student may not know to help guide and model behaviors for the student so they can become independent. Teachers may use various techniques to include students with ASD within the school community and support diverse socialization opportunities.

Inclusion Classroom Teacher Stress

While various techniques are available to support educator systems to teach students with ASD, general education teachers often feel stressed when working with students with moderate to high-functioning ASD due to not understanding the disorder, how to accommodate students, and how to accommodate and modify assignments for individual students (Finlay et al., 2022). Thus, it may be beneficial for administrations to acknowledge and listen to the hardships of general education teachers working with students with ASD to understand how to provide educator support to avoid burnout (Finlay et al., 2022). Teacher burnout can affect a teacher's confidence within the classroom; even further, patience can become limited when teaching

students with moderate to high-functioning ASD (Finlay et al., 2022). If school administrators do not address burn out from their teachers, it may critically impact students' data and data for the school. Burnout can affect schools because teachers will not feel supported and may leave the school or profession (Finlay et al., 2022).

The burnout and patience limitations may explain the higher rate of general and special education teachers leaving the profession with reported stress, perceptions of limited support, and few resources within the classroom (Finlay et al., 2022). General education teachers with little knowledge or experience in special education have a more challenging time understanding and teaching students with high behavioral needs and ASD (Gilmour & Wehby, 2020). Alternatively, teachers with special education certifications may feel more equipped to work with students with high behavioral challenges and ASD, resulting in a lower turnover rate due to such working requirements (Finlay et al., 2019, 2022; Gilmour & Wehby, 2020). Preparation and efficacy aligned with teaching students with ASD seemingly allow for higher success rates for both the educator and student when considering academic achievement. Responsively, general education teachers should consider exploring additional formal education, such as a dual certification, in supporting student needs and improving self-efficacy. When teachers have a certificate or dual certifications in special education, they are trained to work with students with disabilities, which may allow for more classroom skills and success.

Teacher burnout may be a critical factor in exploring the skills and will of both general and special education teachers. Since teachers have a high burnout and turnover rate, an educator may feel a continued career in education is unbearable (Finlay et al., 2019; 2022). Burnout may exist due to unrealistic expectations and minimal assistance from school administrators (Woltran et al., 2022). A lack of teacher support may also encourage a lack of confidence and develop a

more challenging position in holding an interest in teaching. Due to the lack of encouragement, such lack of interest may disadvantage students with and without ASD. Similarly, when teachers are not appropriately trained to support the inclusion classroom setting, burnout may occur faster (Gilmour & Wehby, 2020; Woltran et al., 2022).

Many teachers are also low-skilled but host a high-will within the educational setting with an excitement to be in the classroom but need assistance in developing the necessary inclusion systems for students (Finlay et al., 2019; 2022). Skill is associated with confidence and being able to implement a lesson to students with moderate to high functioning ASD; if a teacher does not have confidence in themselves and the ability to deliver a lesson, it may become problematic. For example, teacher motivation may influence classroom implementation and student achievement success. If teachers are unmotivated and unaccepting of professional development and changing new approaches in education, the results may be detrimental to the students as a direct consequence of the limited teacher will (Osman & Warner, 2020). Limitations can also closely relate to teachers' inadequate training to support moderate to high-functioning students with ASD. If general education teachers do not have the proper certification (Gilmour & Wehby, 2020; Osman & Warner, 2020), the teacher's will to teach can become significantly lower.

Educator Success in the Classroom

Many factors can determine a teacher's success, such as self-efficacy, personal values, and perception of teachers before and after a series of professional developments (Finlay et al., 2019; 2022; Osman & Warner, 2020). The teacher's needs within the classroom will determine what type of accommodations, approaches, and support the inclusion teacher may seek or receive. Support can include one-on-one and or group mentorship from coaches and

administrative leaders (Osman & Warner, 2020). With coaching and mentorship, inclusion teachers may feel more successful and more confident in assisting students with ASD within the classroom. The more trained teachers are, the more willing educators are to stay within the classroom (Gilmour & Wehby, 2020; Osman & Warner, 2020). Supportive resources may also allow a more positive perception for students with ASD because teachers will have the knowledge and skills to succeed in the inclusion classroom (Gilmour & Wehby, 2020; Osman & Warner, 2020).

Supporting teacher success by offering professional development courses for primary and special education teachers can be critical for educators and school leaders (Finlay et al., 2019; 2022). There are several instances where professional development series have included resources and provided a strong support network for general and special education teachers (Finlay et al., 2019; 2022; Osman & Warner, 2020). Interestingly, there is no correlation between years of experience and self-advocacy when it comes to teaching students with disabilities when considering the use of teacher professional development as a framework (Finlay et al., 2019; 2022; Osman & Warner, 2020). Professional development practitioners should focus on raising teacher quality, allowing for accountability for special and general education teachers (Finlay et al., 2019; 2022).

Like skill versus will, Bloom’s (1956) taxonomy focused on a child's cognitive development, which is a powerful tool for children, especially inside and outside the classroom. Bloom’s (1956) taxonomy focuses on different levels and high-order thinking, which can help students succeed within the classroom. Interestingly, when Bloom's (1956) taxonomy is applied in school settings, students experience a more thorough education (Pikhart & Klimova, 2019). Teachers can use this framework with classroom objectives, lessons, and activities or projects to

support students' understanding of the concepts and principles being taught (Pikhart & Klimova, 2019). The varied thinking levels help students with moderate to high-functioning ASD within the classroom because it will allow them to build their cognitive thinking skills, especially in the older years of school (Pikhart & Klimova, 2019; Saxena et al., 2021).

Teacher Perception of Training Success

Teacher buy-in may be essential when developing and implementing professional development. If there is already a perception that the new skill(s) will not work, the chances of a change within the classroom will be low (Osman & Warner, 2020; Ozyilmaz et al., 2018). Educators who believe a new system and training will not work would need a different form of professional development, such as one-on-one coaching with an administrator and monitoring that tools are being used with fidelity (Osman & Warner, 2020), to learn a new or required skill. When educators are given realistic professional development with support from a trainer or administrator, data shows more success within the classroom, confidence, and willingness to learn more techniques within the school (Ozyilmaz et al., 2018). Students will often thrive within the inclusion setting with the proper skills and desire to learn from teachers, especially if the students see their teacher's excitement, encouragement, and knowledge (Osman & Warner, 2020; Vela Llauradó et al., 2022; Ozyilmaz et al., 2018).

Early and tiered interventions are critical when working with students with ASD (Snyder et al., 2017). Students with developmental delays or ASD need skills focusing on fundamental math and English elements (Snyder et al., 2017). Successful interventions concentrate on instruction and critical skills. General education teachers must learn that approach when connecting academics to real-life situations (Snyder et al., 2017). Balancing real-life concepts into general teaching processes and supporting an inclusion classroom simultaneously can be

challenging. Thus, training programs to teach methods to support the inclusive classroom must be offered. New techniques can also be used when working with new technologies within the classroom (Lee, 2021). Students with developmental delay, intellectual disability, or ASD may benefit from using different types of technologies and applications to assist them in foundations for math and English (Lee, 2021; Snyder et al., 2017).

Professional Development and Autism Spectrum Disorder

Teaching constantly changes, and new requirements are needed to become mainstream teachers (Ho et al., 2018). Similarly, ASD is a complex disability that may create difficulty for students with social interaction, behaviors, and academics within a school setting. ASD classifications can also vary among students (Ho et al., 2018). The disconnect with teachers is honest and genuine because not all teachers may know and understand ASD as a disability. A variety of professional development and coaching methods when implementing the curriculum for students with ASD may benefit teachers. Professional development with feedback following observations is the most useful so teachers can make immediate changes within their teaching practices (Tekin-Iftar, 2017). The feedback may also allow teachers to gather ideas for attention grabbers, re-teaching opportunities, and project ideas (Ho et al., 2018; Tekin-Iftar, 2017).

Reading and Comprehension

There are many professional development programs to help students with reading comprehension (Accardo & Finnegan, 2019). Students with ASD may have a discrepancy in reading within the comprehension and decoding processes of written messages (Snyder et al., 2017; Tekin-Iftar, 2017). Thus, students with ASD may benefit from targeted evidence-based reading comprehension and remediation lessons to assist them better in the classroom (Snyder et al., 2017; Tekin-Iftar, 2017). Visuals, read-aloud, reciprocal questioning, graphic organizers, and

diagrams often help within English and literacy inclusion classrooms (Accardo & Finnegan, 2019). Using evidence-based development in literacy and interventions allows teachers to feel more comfortable and confident when teaching reading to students with ASD (Tekin-Iftar, 2017; Accardo & Finnegan, 2019). Therefore, using supportive resources to guide reading comprehension education in the general classroom is a significant source of support for general classroom teachers (Accardo & Finnegan, 2019; Tekin-Iftar, 2017).

When considering the achievement gap between students with ASD within a typical school setting, the modular intervention framework assists teachers with different evidence-based interventions to better serve all students (Anderson et al., 2018). The modular intervention framework will allow teachers to implement interventions based on the student's needs. Pinpointing the students' specific needs would help the teacher better serve all students (Anderson et al., 2021; Tekin-Iftar, 2017). A modular intervention framework is a model to assist students with ASD better in helping implement evidence-based practices and interventions within the classroom, including academics and behavioral interventions (Anderson et al., 2021). Various inventions and support can help students with positive behavior in and outside the classroom. The intervention may include different supports, such as the school psychologist, occupational therapist, special education team, and administration (Tekin-Iftar, 2017).

Mainstream education for students with moderate to high-functioning ASD is necessary to better assist them within the inclusion setting (Ryan & Mathews, 2022). Teachers with certification and professional development in ASD have a much better understanding of how to work with students with moderate to high-functioning ASD academically and behaviorally than teachers who have not (Ryan & Mathews, 2022). Proper classroom management knowledge can help students with ASD with behavioral needs (Anderson et al., 2021). Support can also come

from the instructional team to help teachers within the classroom (Ryan & Mathews, 2022). Similarly, intervention and instructional coaches assist teachers with support when working with students with moderate to high-functioning ASD within the inclusion classroom (Anderson et al., 2018; Ryan & Mathews, 2022).

Early Interventions

Early interventions are critical for students with ASD to assist in different areas, such as speech and language, occupational therapy, physical therapy, social and emotional behaviors, and academics (Anderson et al., 2018). The use of a technology program, JASPER, allows for more support for students identified with ASD and those from the early months of age to third grade (Panganiban et al., 2022). This software assists the teachers with modeling, student play routines, and language support to better help them academically and socially (Panganiban et al., 2022). The software also assists the teachers with listening to different materials and student activities. While teacher-child interactions are not a significant factor in using the JASPER system, educators often feel more prepared to develop classroom activities appropriate for their classroom (Anderson et al., 2018). Programs and software such as JASPER can be valuable tools for supporting the needs of students with ASD (Anderson et al., 2018). Using JASPER or other software support systems will provide teachers with another resource that may benefit students with ASD (Anderson et al., 2018).

Teacher Self-Efficacy with Assistive Technologies

Teacher efficacy is also essential when developing and implementing professional development. If teachers already perceive that the new skill or skills will not work, the chances of a change within the academic setting will be low with limited student support. Teachers with a negative perception of a new skill would need a different form of professional development, such

as one-on-one coaching with an administrator (Panganiban et al., 2022), to provide the best opportunity for integrating a new or required program. When teachers are given realistic professional development with support from instructional coaches and administration, students may be more successful within the classroom, with confidence and willingness to learn more techniques within the school (Osman & Warner, 2020; Vela Llauradó et al., 2022). Realistic professional developments are especially assistive technologies useful for students with ASD (Almeida et al., 2016).

There are many software and application systems that teachers can use. Technology is constantly changing, so the use of technology needs to be continuously revised in professional development (Ullah, 2020). General and special education inclusion teachers also need professional development regarding computers and other instructional and assistive technology used to keep up with current changes in technology to support their students better (Lee et al., 2021). Using assistive technologies, such as tablets and computers, is essential when teaching students with ASD. New and veteran teachers are often expected to utilize new technologies within the classroom (Almeida et al., 2016). However, the teachers may feel that they are insufficiently prepared to use technology effectively in their classrooms after professional development or teacher preparation programs (Lee et al., 2021).

Technology-based interventions for students with ASD are essential for students' academic success. However, technology can be a significant barrier if teachers do not understand computers, programs, or application use (Almeida et al., 2016). This issue may be more common in urban schools than in rural or suburban settings due to a lack of funding for professional development. Further, instructional technology, computers, and other devices not used to their full potential can harm a student’s academic success (Almeida et al., 2016). Like teachers, if

students lack self-efficacy when it comes to technology, their willingness to learn may decrease. The more a teacher uses and models technology within an inclusion classroom, the more chances students will have and be able to thrive within the school, just as the students that do not have a disability. Consistent and proper use of technology may also allow students to be more technologically efficient in and out of the classroom (Almeida et al., 2016).

Special education teachers in an urban setting may be encouraged to incorporate technology interventions within different subject areas. (Almeida et al., 2016). Schools incorporating Universal Design for Learning (UDL) allow all students to enhance participation and engagement within the inclusion classroom (Ciampa, 2017; Ullah, 2020). UDL may also assist all types of learners and students in the school with academics and social behaviors (Ullah, 2020). General and special education teachers who may have difficulty implementing UDL due to the lack of knowledge may interfere with the learning of students with moderate to high-functioning ASD. Also, due to the schools that may be low-income, there might not be enough funding to bring these effective technologies and professional development to the school (Ciampa, 2017; Ullah, 2020). UDL is a critical teaching tool in a special education setting that enhances student learning (Ciampa, 2017; Ullah, 2020). Ultimately, this affects students with ASD because it is a valuable tool that can be an asset to the students and their future.

Tools in the classroom are essential for all students to use to meet their individual needs. However, educators need practical professional development skills to learn how to use classroom assistive technology tools; without the training, the assistive devices may be less effective (Jury et al., 2021; Sam et al., 2021). When there is more of a focus on educating teachers and paraprofessionals about students with ASD within the inclusion setting, there is more of a positive response academically and socially within the classroom (Jury et al., 2021). This would

also allow teachers and paraprofessionals to incorporate different types of learning within the classroom with fidelity to better assist with academics and behaviors. Giving students multiple ways to access learning can bridge the potential academic and behavioral gap (Jury et al., 2021; Sam et al., 2021).

Attitude can hinder a teacher's development when working with students with moderate to high-functioning ASD. Teachers' attitudes depend on the behavior of a student with ASD (Finlay et al., 2019; 2022). If a teacher has a negative attitude toward teacher students with autism, then the teacher may limit the student's ability to be academically and behaviorally (Finlay et al., 2019; 2022). Suppose the student has increased behavioral difficulties and cognitive difficulties. In that case, the teacher may have a negative attitude and interactions with the student, developing a low probability of continued academic success for the student (Jury et al., 2021). Stigma is often present in schools among students with moderate to high functioning (Ciampa, 2017; Ullah, 2020). This perspective may also bring negative connotations about students with ASD due to teachers potentially believing that students with ASD may have difficulty or cannot learn a potential skill (Ciampa, 2017). If a teacher is having difficulty when working with students with disabilities, then the teacher support will be low when it comes to academics (Ciampa, 2017; Jury et al., 2021).

Educators may find that technology benefits teaching and learning, communicating, and developing positive social behaviors among students with and without ASD. Some students with ASD are non-verbal, so various technological devices may assist students with communicating with their peers, teachers, staff, and members of their families by using visual supports and other symbols (Maseri et al., 2021). With such technology, staff members must understand how to operate, use, and troubleshoot the technology to be used with fidelity (Maseri et al., 2021). The

different applications that may be used may assist students with sensory issues, address specific learning needs, and offer more of an engaging and calming experience for students (Maseri et al., 2021).

Today, many applications that help students communicate with others are easily used on handheld devices. Commands can also include small pictures that can assist with basic human needs such as restroom requests, nutrition needs, and responses to requests, questions, or activities (Maseri et al., 2021; Sam et al., 2021). iCAN is a software with positive feedback that allows students with ASD to communicate their needs with the teachers (Maseri et al., 2021). Like other software, iCAN requires educators and guardians to take 16 weeks of software training (Maseri et al., 2021). Such software systems, although helpful, may be too demanding for teachers who are already limited in time and energy (Maseri et al., 2021; Woltran et al., 2022).

Educators with limited time and energy often experience high-stress levels (Woltran et al., 2022). When educators experience high-stress levels, negative attitudes toward students with ASD and behavioral difficulties usually surface (Woltran et al., 2022). Interestingly, teachers in inclusive classrooms have a limited negative attitude when working with students with ASD and cognitive disabilities (Maseri et al., 2021). While such stress seems isolated within the inclusion classroom, educators often experience high levels due to the necessity of managing classroom behaviors with all types of students (Jury et al., 2021; Woltran et al., 2022). Such stress levels and limited confidence may be why teachers experience burnout.

Stress and Teaching

Even though teaching students with ASD can be rewarding, there may be challenges and potentially mental and physical health challenges. Burnout and stress may be managed through

collaboration efforts within the teaching community (Al Jaffa, 2022). Unfortunately, some teachers lack the perception of collaboration and feel disconnected from resources and training to support the academic success of students with ASD (Al Jaffa, 2022; Clausen et al., 2022). High-quality professional development is a significant factor in helping the educator teach students with ASD, especially those with moderate to high-functioning ASD (Al Jaffa, 2022; Clausen et al., 2022). A framework called TIES is used to better assist with managing collaboration. TIES stands for Time, Instructional Effectiveness, Engagement, and State support for inclusive practices (Clausen et al., 2022). It has been shown that general education teachers may not be prepared to teach students with ASD or other disabilities and need more training when it comes to techniques on scaffolding and differentiation work (Al Jaffa, 2022; Clausen et al., 2022).

General and special education teachers must be able to advocate for their needs to educational administrators to ensure that high-quality and appropriately developed educational systems are provided for students (Clausen et al., 2022). Training specifically focused on teaching within an inclusive classroom may be a significant factor in the success of students with ASD. Providing inclusive classroom teachers with a platform to communicate needs and professional development preferences is necessary to overcome perceived barriers some educators experience (Al Jaffa, 2022; Clausen et al., 2022). Seeking assistance from colleagues, leadership, and professionals may help teachers succeed in the inclusion classroom and support students with ASD.

One significant barrier to supporting the success of inclusion teachers and students with ASD is the lack of knowledge surrounding the disability coding of ASD (McClain, 2019). Many general education teachers have limited knowledge regarding ASD and the effects disability has on education (McClain, 2019). Unfortunately, general education teachers are limited in the

knowledge needed to request training to support students with ASD. In that case, administrators may be less likely to seek out training programs to support the needs of a minority population of teachers in the inclusion setting (McClain, 2019). The lack of training and support can negatively impact the quality of education given to students with ASD.

Alternative Support Tools

There are many tools that teachers and supporting professionals can use to assist students with ASD outside of professional development programming (Al Jaffa, 2022). Since there is a high level of students with moderate to high-functioning ASD within the inclusion classroom (Al Jaffa, 2022; Clausen et al., 2022), finding alternative tools that limit the training and stress associated with the technology is needed. One tool that offers support with limited overhead administrative training to assist with math and language art education (Sulek et al., 2021). When using tools with little administrative preparation, general and special education teachers can be equipped with applications that meet students where they are, regardless of ability, knowing such devices are necessary for all teachers (McClain, 2019; Sulek et al., 2021).

Other tools and techniques to support young students with developmental delays (DD) or ASD are centered around play (Sidhu et al., 2022). When educators are focused on social skills and everyday behaviors, a system of play combined with Bloom's (1956) taxonomy can be helpful (Sidhu et al., 2022). When teachers use this programming type, students can choose the activity, allowing students' social skills to develop more strongly (Sidhu et al., 2022). When students with DD and ASD utilize play to build socialization skills, the engagement rate among peers and educators can increase, further supporting academic success (McClain, 2019; Sidhu et al., 2022). Administrators must be mindful of the opportunities, training, and support inclusion

teachers need to continue supporting success among students with ASD in rural and urban settings.

Quality of Professional Development in Urban Areas

Limited funding may dictate the availability of tools, resources, and training programs administrators offer to inclusion teachers (Reddy et al., 2021). In urban settings, some schools experience limited funding sources to support all types of professional development. Due to urban population density, educators may experience more students with ASD in school than in a rural and limited population district. With more students with higher needs attending school, funding sources may be scarce and restricted due to being stretched across the entire student population (Reddy et al., 2021). Limited funding often affects urban and low socio-economic areas, creating insufficient training and professional development resources (Reddy et al., 2021). Teachers in urban education also have additional stressors that include violence, large class sizes, poor behavior, and a lack of social skills among students (Reddy et al., 2021). When coupled with the stress associated with learning and utilizing new assistive technology, educators may avoid learning new skills simply due to stress (Kim et al., 2020; Reddy et al., 2021). Burnout further adds to the limitation of supporting students simply due to the lack of energy educators may experience.

Despite the limited energy teachers experience in the urban setting for learning new skills, quality professional development opportunities are necessary for student success. While inclusion classrooms thus far have focused on student abilities, the general classroom and inclusion classroom must be culturally sensitive to guide a robust and rigorous academic foundation relating to all students (Casagrande & Ingersoll, 2017). Providing quality professional development opportunities and other training may guide a more robust perception of confidence

among teachers when teaching students with ASD within the inclusion setting (Casagrande & Ingersoll, 2017).

Confidence is necessary for all teachers. However, when teaching language, phonics, and vocabulary within the kindergarten classroom, educators must be prepared for significant differences in ability among all students, regardless of disability. Language develops early, and teachers must use rich vocabulary even within early education (Ouellette et al., 2018). Students with moderate to high-functioning ASD need to be around a rich amount of language to help develop their speech and language skills (Ouellette et al., 2018; Sparapani et al., 2021). Since many kindergarten teachers are prompted to use close-ended questions with students due to age and comprehension levels (Sparapani et al., 2021), a necessary awareness of open-ended questions to aid in language development among students with ASD (Ouellette et al., 2018; Sparapani et al., 2021). Close-ended questions limit the necessary language development students with ASD need early on (Sparapani et al., 2021).

Language development and other types of support in urban schools may be expected due to the density of the population. Related support services often utilized in educational settings include speech and language pathology, occupational therapy, mental health support, behavioral therapy, and physical therapy (Ouellette et al., 2018). Thus, higher stress levels among urban schoolteachers than rural teachers may be inferred simply due to the added focus on necessary student services. Responsively, administrators may see teachers experiencing burnout earlier on in an urban teaching career than in another setting. Providing professional development opportunities focusing on managing burnout, self-care, and mental health may help encourage educators to continue working in the urban environment for more extended periods (Ouellette et al., 2018).

Schools with high violence rates among students also have higher teacher turnover (Reddy et al., 2021). Responsively, a violent environment may increase teacher stress and burnout rates. So, administrators must be attentive in providing teachers with evidence-based practices to manage stress and develop emotional strength to work with students who exhibit behaviors needing correction (Ouellette et al., 2018). Often, students with moderate to high-functioning ASD exhibit yelling and violent behaviors that can create frustration for the teacher managing an inclusive classroom (Ouellette et al., 2018). When teachers are provided with professional development opportunities to learn how to manage student outbursts, educators can more easily manage the classroom to focus on academic goals (Ouellette et al., 2018; Reddy et al., 2021). Some professional development programs are offered in a series to allow teachers to build upon knowledge and implement ideas. More in-depth training may also involve an instructional teaching coach to support teaching in a one-on-one setting that is experienced in real-time (Ouellete et al., 2018).

Unfortunately, school services are often not tailored to help students with moderate to high-functioning ASD or English language learners (Suhrheinrich et al., 2021). While legally bound to provide school services, urban schools do not uncommonly have limitations in providing appropriate accommodations (Suhrheinrick et al., 2021). Educators may often feel additional stressors and burnout when students cannot receive the proper services, further contributing to educational problems by restricting the classroom environment and failing to meet student needs (Ouellette et al., 2018; Suhrheinrich et al., 2021). Inclusion classrooms often provide a bridge to supporting the needs of students with ASD through scaffolding and socialization with non-disabled peers (Ouellette et al., 2018; Suhrheinrich et al., 2021).

Today, urban and inner-city school district administrators recognize the gap in understanding and teaching students with moderate to high-functioning ASD, especially in early childhood education settings (Peterson & Bloom 2020; 2021). Such recognition has moved administrators to consider the learning environments of early childhood education to meet students where they are at in their development, so all students are appropriately supported (Peterson & Bloom 2020; 2021). In early education classrooms, preschool teachers primarily focus on social behaviors and beginning academics with the students within the classroom (Suhrheinrich et al., 2021). Since socialization can be a significant issue for students with ASD, teachers within the inclusion setting should consider seeking continuous training and support from administrators to better guide, understand, and manage behavioral and social limitations for students (Mohammed et al., 2021).

Paraprofessionals for students with ASD may also need training and assistance when teaching students within the classroom (Morin et al., 2022). Frequently, paraprofessionals and inclusion teachers collaborate and communicate with one another (Morin et al., 2022). Such communication and collaboration are significant factors in appropriately supporting students for paraprofessionals since such educators are often moving from one classroom to another throughout the day (Morin et al., 2022). Paraprofessionals are also responsible for assisting students with ASD by providing small group and one-on-one instruction. The support process for students with ASD may also include communication, including visual aids, assistive technologies, trackers, social stories, and other supports to be utilized within the classroom (Morin et al., 2022). Thus, providing professional development training should be considered for all educators to support student achievement for all students (Morin et al., 2022; Peterson Bloom, 2020; 2021).

Developing Support for Inclusion Student Success

Providing support for educators of all career paths in early childhood education inclusion settings is necessary for supporting continued learning and excellence for all students, especially those with ASD (Morin et al., 2022; Peterson Bloom, 2020; 2021). This literature review examined several facets of educator professional development, inclusion, and support systems. Still, there is a need to explore the experiences of early childhood educators utilizing professional development programming to support early childhood education for students with ASD. Support for educators and parents should be considered a combined system to provide educational achievement for students with ASD. Practical support and collaboration among educators, parents, administration, and related service providers will allow students with ASD to feel supported inside and outside the classroom and confident academically and socially (Morin et al., 2022).

Educator Support

Inclusion-setting educators experience stress and burnout (Al Jaffa, 2022; Clausen et al., 2022). Thus, supporting teachers with various support sources may aid in continued student achievement. Some educators opt to use a system of scaffolding among students with ASD and students without ASD (Odem et al., 2018). When connecting students, educators may find that both types of students continue advancing their individualized skills while supporting another student's learning (Cheek, 2019; Pikhart & Klimova, 2019). Holistically, educators may also consider using a theoretical framework to guide their students' learning. Bloom’s (1956) taxonomy guides educators in developing higher-order thinking and in-depth questions for students to create an academically rigorous learning environment (Kamara et al., 2021; Krathwohl, 2002; Pikhart & Klimova, 2019).

Students with ASD often thrive in an environment utilizing Bloom's (1956) taxonomy due to the guided and multi-leveled support for developing communication and social skills while analyzing various tasks and building connections (Krathwohl, 2002). Even further, students who learn using Bloom's (1956) taxonomy often apply the skills they learned in future real-world settings (Kamara et al., 2021). For these reasons, administrators and educators should consider seeking professional development systems that implement Bloom's (1956) taxonomy as another tool to support academic student achievement.

Educators who choose to use Bloom's (1956) taxonomy as a holistic approach may find that the process aligns well with the individual education plan (IEP) for students with ASD (Kamara et al., 2021). Even further, having teachers be a part of professional development that increases critical thinking is a skill for all students and helps younger students with executive functioning (Wallis et al., 2021; Gunderson, 2017). When including all teachers, not just inclusion teachers, in Bloom's (1956) taxonomy professional development series, administrators may find that a more robust system of pedagogical materials is developed with higher-order and critical thinking skills (Fonseca Amorim, 2018; Thompson & O'Loughlin, 2015). Developing stronger critical thinking skills may support stronger communication patterns within the classroom. Stronger communication skills may lead to a better understanding of what students are learning, how students are learning, and what concepts need to be explored further to clarify the overall core learning outcomes. Even further, stronger critical thinking skills can help engage students with ASD with a higher order of thinking and will allow more rigorous work within the classroom.

Technological software programs often claim to help students with ASD develop critical thinking, reading, and fluency skills (Afacan, 2020). The software programs are enticing for

teachers in the inclusion setting since many students with ASD and intellectual disabilities (ID) struggle with reading comprehension of literature and informational text, phonological awareness, and vocabulary (Afacan, 2020). A downfall in the new technologies, techniques, and software is that teachers struggle to use and integrate the software features within different parts of lessons (Afacan, 2020). Regardless of the many opportunities to support educators in the classroom, there is a gap in the literature exploring interventions for kindergarten teachers implementing professional development programming in the kindergarten classroom to help students with ASD. This study aims to examine the experiences of educators to add to the body of knowledge and allow educators to voice their lived experiences in teaching students with ASD.

Parental Support

Education and social involvement of students with ASD do not stop within the school building or classroom. Parents of students with ASD may continue lessons at home, expand learning with outside resources, or involve their children in extra-curricular activities. Unfortunately, not all parents commit to learning collaboration with teachers regarding academics and growth, creating frustration and confusion for early childhood educators (D'Entremont et al., 2022; Lynch et al., 2023; Slade et al., 2018). When administrators, educators, related services providers, and parents collaborate in teaching skills, lessons, and concepts at home and in school, parents of students with ASD often benefit through a more strongly perceived self-efficacy in supporting their child with ASD (D'Entremont et al., 2022).

Educators and administrators should consider exploring and encouraging the partnership between teachers and parents or guardians to advance student learning further (Lynch et al., 2023). While the solution to developing collaboration seems straightforward, parents are often

limited in their communication availability due to the high-demand careers necessary to support the living standards of the student's family (Lynch et al., 2023). Educators and parents may need to consider alternative communication methods outside of traditional face-to-face methods to develop strong communication connections that support students with ASD. However, educators must be aware that access to modern communication methods may be limited for some families with limited socio-economic status, making it necessary for educators to develop individualized plans for parent-student-educator communication.

If communication remains limited, the educator and student may feel more stress associated with student learning and success. In addition, financial, social, and emotional strain in low socio-economic families may lead to limited student achievement progression. Overall, the stress and strain of the learner may transfer to the educator if the student digresses in progress. Further research exploring supportive professional development is needed to support educators of students with ASD from all levels of socio-economic status.

Summary

This literature review explored the inclusive classroom setting for teachers of students with ASD. Professional development is a must to support educators in developing skills associated with managing, supporting, and educating students with ASD. When educators struggle to develop rigorous educational systems for students with ASD (Miled, 2019), teachers unknowingly create an environment that fails to prepare students for continuous educational advancement (Miled, 2019). This study aims to examine the lived experiences of kindergarten inclusion teachers to fill the gap associated with professional development support for inclusion education environments (Teo et al., 2022). Using Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, this study will examine how educators describe teaching behaviors through cognitive, behavioral,

and environmental factors to answer the central research question and add to the qualitative body of knowledge.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of utilizing professional resources to aid in the early childhood education development of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder for teachers at charter schools in a large city in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The general inclusion setting is defined as a classroom that is used for both special and general education students. This chapter discussed the research design, research question, setting, participants, recruitment plan, procedures, data collection plans, and the study's trustworthiness. This chapter also included my responsibility for this study and my standpoint on the subject matter.

Research Design

For this study, a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological design was utilized. Phenomenology is about living human experiences of phenomena (van Manen, 1997). The study used three methods to collect data: individual interviews, a focus group, and observations. The phenomenological design allowed participants to engage and help understand lived experiences through classroom teachers (van Manen, 1997). A qualitative research design was essential for this study because it focused on teachers' lived experiences within the classroom serving students with ASD and their methods for accessing professional development and training (van Manen, 1997). Using individual interviews, a focus group, and observations allowed me to gain more insights into the professional development and training that general education teachers need to better assist students with ASD in succeeding in the classroom. In this study, I focused on the teachers' experiences, resources, and professional development needed to assist special and general education teachers in helping students with ASD academically.

Research Questions

The following research questions were used to focus on paraprofessionals, general and special educators, and their human experience within the classroom with students with ASD. The research questions allowed for a deeper understanding of professional developments in which educators have participated, deciding whether it was helpful. The research questions were guided by social cognitive theory (SCT) to examine self-efficacy, experiences, attitudes toward professional development, and other training to assist teachers of students with ASD (Baudura, 1986). The research questions aimed to better understand the educator's emotions, comfort levels, and attitude within that classroom.

Central Research Question

How do early childhood education teachers describe their experiences utilizing supportive resources to aid in the academic development of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder within the general education classroom r?

Sub-Question One

How do early childhood education teachers describe their self-efficacy in teaching children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder in the general education classroom?

Sub-Question Two

How do early childhood education teachers describe their access to professional development opportunities that aid in the academic development of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder in the general classroom?

Sub Question Three

How do early childhood education teachers describe their attitudes surrounding supportive resources in teaching children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder in the general education classroom?

Setting and Participants

The setting of this study was in various urban charter elementary schools within the Washington, D.C., area. The demographics of students attending the schools were 90 - 94% African American or Black students, 5 - 10 % Hispanic or Latinx, and 1 - 3% unspecified. Lastly, 100% of students from the elementary schools within this setting were on free or reduced lunch or came from middle to low-income families. Participants of this study focused on teachers or paraprofessionals in the general or special education fields who are currently teaching within the inclusion pre-kindergarten setting.

Setting

The setting for this study was two charter schools in a large city in the mid-Atlantic region. The grades that both schools offer is from Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 8. Primary students within the school are considered an at-risk population, with families with a moderate to low economic status. Within the schools, the pre-kindergarten setting was utilized to explore the lived experiences of the educators and their experiences using resources to teach in an inclusive setting because the teachers in these classrooms have direct experience with the phenomenon being explored. The inclusion setting had a variety of students with identified disabilities within the special education program and students with ASD. The primary focus of the study was guided by the interaction and support that educators experience while teaching students with ASD. This type of setting also provided the students with a general and special education

teacher. This also allowed students with exceptionalities to be given accommodations and modifications alongside their nondisabled peers (Wu et al., 2019).

Participants

Participants had to be current paraprofessionals, special educators, and general education teachers in the prekindergarten classroom. All participants were at least 18 years or older. The participants in the study had various teaching experiences, ranging from novice to veteran teachers in the field. However, participants must have had experience teaching students with ASD within the inclusion setting. All participants signed a consent form to participate in the interviews, focus groups, and observations.

Recruitment Plan

After obtaining IRB approval (see Appendix A), I recruited 12 participants who were early elementary educators, special education teachers, or paraprofessionals. The participants' teaching experience varied from one year to multiple years. Participants were asked to sign a consent form (see Appendix B) and acknowledge that the study participation is strictly voluntary and that compensation will not be received in exchange. After requesting site approval (see Appendix C) and receiving site permission (see Appendix D), I emailed a recruitment letter (see Appendix E) to recruit my participants. I followed up with an emailed follow-up letter (see Appendix F) within two weeks with potential participants who had not responded. The process allowed me to recruit 12 teacher or paraprofessional participants. It is important to note that no students were used for this study. The study focused on how general education classroom teachers, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals interacted with students with ASD. In addition, I observed how work is being modified and accommodated for the participants based on the teacher's previous professional development and training.

Researcher Positionality

I have been teaching children aged two to 18 for approximately 13 years in general, self-contained, and inclusion settings. While in the classroom, I encountered many teachers who did not know how to instruct students with ASD. I have witnessed many students being disadvantaged by the teacher's lack of knowledge. I have also experienced teachers asking if students could be taken out of the class during formal observations, so the students do not interfere with observation results. These are only a few examples of the inequalities witnessed during my years of teaching. Thus, my passion for studying this topic has arisen from the drive for inclusivity and equality.

Currently, I am a special education coordinator (SEC) who works with compliance with individualized education plans (IEP) and assists students in evaluating those who may qualify for an IEP. I also coordinate related service providers in speech and language, behavioral support, and physical and occupational therapy. I have seen a significant gap when it comes to communication between general education students and students who have moderate to high-functioning ASD. I also noticed that students with mild to high-functioning ASD were not given the same rigorous work as the general education students. In my profession, I have also experienced teachers making judgments about students without understanding the students' strengths and weaknesses. As a result, classroom equity was reduced, and a divided classroom was created. For these reasons, the interpretive framework guiding this study will be pragmatism (Dewey, 1938).

Interpretive Framework

The pragmatic framework guiding the study holds value, meaning, opinions, and facts found in research data (Dewey, 1938). This framework also allows researchers to see what works

within a study and help identify problem areas within a field (Kelley & Cordeiro, 2020). Aligned with pragmatism, educational progression requires that stakeholders understand what processes and systems work to support students with ASD in inclusion settings. It is also shown that educational stakeholders must understand what works when assisting and helping teachers with resources and professional development (Corona et al., 2017). Students with moderate to high-functioning ASD may need modified schoolwork and accommodations, and through conducting this study, I hope to guide further research and interpretations that support the continued progression of general education teachers who support all student needs.

Philosophical Assumptions

The philosophical assumptions I brought to this study will guide readers to a more robust understanding of the descriptions I develop from the collected research data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My experiences working with students with ASD have guided my beliefs that all students should be included and supported in their education through developed smaller groups, one-on-one attention, modified work, behavioral support, and accommodations to succeed in a classroom setting (Francisco et al., 2020). These experiences have guided the assumptions that I brought to this study. Examining my ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions will provide insight into my position within this study.

Ontological Assumption

Ontology focuses on reality's universal nature and the different perspectives from which it is developed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I have worked in education for over 13 years, and in my experience, I have seen different types of professional development and teachers utilizing them within the classroom. I have seen students on different educational levels succeed due to teachers' belief that all students can learn. I have also seen professional development evolve

while providing various methods to help assist students. During this study, there will be a variety of perspectives from one universal reality on students with ASD, training, and professional development. I acknowledge that the participants will have different experiences from mine and others in this universal reality. My years in the education system will enable me to explore various perspectives on the singular reality and the phenomenon of this study.

Epistemological Assumption

The epistemological assumption addresses what I consider knowledge, how knowledge claims are justified, and the relationship between what is being researched and me (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I developed knowledge by developing a sense of closeness with my participants by conducting various interactive data collection methods. I used one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and classroom observations to get an in-depth look at teachers and how the teachers work with students with ASD within the inclusion classroom. During one-on-one interviews and focus groups, I will listen to educators' experiences and what they would like to learn to support students with ASD within the inclusion setting. My experience in education allowed me to deeply explore the lived experiences my participants share from an educated perspective and understanding of the special education field. Thus, my developed closeness, various data collection methods, and knowledge of the career field aided in creating a trustworthy study that adds to the body of knowledge.

Axiological Assumption

Axiological assumption acknowledges a researcher’s biases within the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a special education coordinator (SEC), I have realized that not all training and professional development have the same value for administrators, teachers, staff, or schools. The significance of this study is that it allowed teachers to have a voice when it came to teaching and

assisting students with ASD within the inclusion classroom. The study focused on the participants, and I explored their experiences and perceptions within their school's special education department. While I value the inclusion of students with ASD in academic settings, I understand that the participants held varying levels of such values. However, when speaking with the participants, I encouraged them to speak truthfully so the participants' actual experiences with students with ASD could be captured. Since I hold a significant level of experience in the field of education, I actively bracketed my biases through reflection to focus on the participants' experiences and descriptions to investigate the research questions of this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Researcher's Role

My role was to be a human instrument and narrator to explore teachers' lived experiences and understand the teacher's self-efficacy within the classroom (van Manen, 1997). Within the study, I was able to develop meaning from the one-on-one interviews, a focus group, and observations. Hermeneutics accepts that we are human, using knowledge and experience (van Manen, 1997). Thus, I guided the meaning and interpretation to better understand the participants' experiences. I was able to set aside my beliefs to avoid misrepresenting my participants' experiences. I also remained neutral and impartial during the study, allowing participants to speak. I will keep a reflective journal to document my feelings and thoughts during the process.

Procedures

The procedure section explains the steps I used to conduct my study. Before seeking IRB approval (see Appendix A) and seeking participant consent (see Appendix B) through recruitment, I requested site permission (see Appendix C) to receive site approval (see Appendix

D). I sought site approval via a letter following up a verbal communication with the principal and the head of the special education department. The degree-granting institution's IRB approved all documents this study used before collecting data. Data was collected through one-on-one interviews (see Appendix G), a focus group (see Appendix H), and observations (see Appendix I). One-on-one interviews occurred physically in a room with no distractions or face-to-face in an online Microsoft Teams virtual setting. I worked hard to ensure that my participants felt comfortable during data collection while ensuring each participant's confidentiality.

Following data collection, I transcribed the data immediately and began analyzing the content for codes and themes. I noted the trends I viewed in the raw data to report my information with fidelity. I also ensured trustworthiness through debriefing and member-checking to ensure I captured the lived experiences of my participants accurately.

Data Collection Plan

This study utilized a hermeneutic phenomenological design to explore teachers' lived experiences utilizing supportive resources in the academic development of children diagnosed with ASD within the general classroom (van Manen, 1997). The three data collection methods that guided my exploration were individual interviews, a focus group, and observations. Individual interviews allowed me to communicate one-on-one with my participants and explore their everyday interactions with students with ASD. The focus group allowed for a follow-up group interview with my participants, which aided in developing a robust understanding of the participants' lived experiences (van Manen, 1997). Finally, utilizing observations allowed me to see educators in action while assisting students with ASD in the inclusion setting. I noted using an observation form to guide my focus and triangulate the study with the observed data.

Participants knew all the data collection methods and action plan details, including the time and place I would be coming in for observations, interviews, and focus groups.

Individual Interviews

Conducting individual interviews was one of the best ways to get qualitative data from participants because it gives researchers an inside look at a person's approach to the topic (Creswell & Poth, 2018). One-on-one interviews occurred physically in a room with no distractions or face-to-face in a Microsoft Teams room. The open-ended interview questions ensure participants express their experiences using an open-ended framework (van Manen, 1997). During the interviews, I handwrote notes in my research journal. All interviews were recorded with permission from the participants. I achieved 12 individual interviews with teacher participants from the charter school network. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. The interview process allowed me to explore the lived experiences and stories (Creswell & Poth, 2017; van Manen, 1997) shared by teachers who utilize supportive resources to guide academic development for students diagnosed with ASD. The following individual interview questions guided the semi-structured interview process, allowing follow-up questions to understand better the lived experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Table 1

Individual Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your teaching career up to your current position. CRQ
2. With what professional skills have you prepared yourself to assist students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD)? SQ1
3. How do you create individualized learning to achieve core learning outcomes? SQ1
4. Describe your feelings when creating revised lesson plans for students with ASD. SQ1

5. What type of professional development programs do you feel should be implemented to support early childhood professionals in educating students with ASD? SQ2
6. How do you create a learning environment conducive to all types of learners? SQ2
7. What are the norms surrounding teachers continuing education programming to support students diagnosed with ASD? SQ2
8. What supportive resources would you recommend for your school to help create knowledge in educating students with ASD? SQ3
9. What are your expectations for your school in providing supportive resources to aid in teaching students with ASD? SQ3
10. What are the general education teacher's responsibilities in developing knowledge for teaching students with ASD? SQ3
11. What else would you like to add to our conversation today that we have not already discussed? CRQ

The above questions allowed me to understand the professional development that the general and special education teachers may have utilized in the teaching process for students with ASD. The sub-questions guide each question developed using the theoretical framework, social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986). Each question was strategically directed by the behavior, environment, and person as elements of social cognitive theory.

Focus Group

The focus group allowed participants to come together and talk to each other about the use of professional development (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Focus groups are helpful because participants can connect about teaching practices, attitudes, and beliefs, discussing each other's commonalities (Otukile-Mongwaketse et al., 2018). The developed discussion among

participants in the focus group setting was able to guide a deeper exploration of the research focus. The focus group lasted 65 minutes in a Microsoft Teams virtual setting. The camera remained on during the group interview to capture non-verbal communication. The focus group maintained a comfortable environment to help participants feel safe contributing to the conversation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I wrote in my research journal during the interview to identify patterns and themes of non-verbal communication as interpreted in my observations during the participant discussion, including my feelings or thoughts that arose. The session was recorded and transcribed by hand to help find the codes and themes as they presented themselves (van Manen, 1997).

Table 2

Focus Group Questions

1. What is the most rewarding classroom aspect of teaching students with ASD? SQ1
2. What is the most challenging classroom aspect of teaching students with ASD? SQ1
3. How does a teaching team guide the teaching methods for educating students with ASD? SQ2
4. What was the most influential professional development program you have attended? SQ2
5. Describe the most valuable ASD learning concept that has changed how you teach students with ASD. SQ3
6. What expectations do you hold when a student with ASD is assigned to your classroom? SQ3
7. If you could make one recommendation to your school to support educating students with ASD, what would you say? CRQ

The focus group questions allowed me to understand the professional development that general and special education teachers have utilized in teaching students with ASD. Questions one and two were guided by sub-question one, questions two and three were guided by sub-question two, and questions five and six were developed using the third sub-question. The final focus group question allowed participants to share additional information that they may not have already shared. Each question is strategically directed by the behavior, environment, and person as elements of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986).

Observations

I conducted observations within the main academic portion of the classroom, which was in the math, reading, or written expression blocks. Observations occurred after the interviewing process and allowed me to reflect on the practices of the special and general education teachers, including the paraprofessionals within the classroom (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The observation method allowed me to get an inside look at personnel experiences within the classroom (van Manen, 1997).

The planned visit with general and special education teachers was coordinated with the participants. Participants were also informed that I was there to observe the interactions with students with ASD and how the students with ASD are integrated into the classroom community. I did not interact with the students. The observations were explicitly focused on observing educators in their inclusion setting.

Before the observation, teachers received a form that I used during the observations. The form included specific areas that I concentrated on. During the observation, I sat in the back of the classroom so I would not be a distraction to anyone in the room. Each observation took

approximately 20 minutes. Teachers also received a copy of my handwritten notes for their review.

Table 3

Observation Form

Name:

Date:

Name of participant:

Time (Time Stamps will be given during the duration of the observation):

Activity (Evidence of accommodations and modifications):

Summary of Events:

Reflective Notes from Participant:

Data Analysis

Data analysis is important for any study because it allows more insight into a particular area of study (van Manen, 1997). When it comes to data analysis in qualitative research, it is essential to use different forms of analysis to understand a person's point of view (van Manen, 1997). In this study, I was able to focus on individual interviews, focus groups, and observations to better assist in gaining knowledge on how general and special education teachers feel supported when working with preschoolers with ASD.

When conducting the individual interviews, I ensured that I allowed the individual to retell their lived experiences (van Manen, 1997). During the interview, I could record, and I was handwriting the notes and answers from the participants. This process allowed me to start coding and looking for different themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018; van Manen, 1997). I ensured that my writing reflected the interviewee's thoughts and feelings (van Manen, 1997). While going through the analysis, I always returned to my central research question to ensure I remained on target. During the individual interviews, I will also be taking notes of different observations I see from the participants. The coding process was done by highlighting common codes and considered themes by hand.

Immediately following the focus group, I transcribed participant communication and verified it by the participants through member-checking (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Hand transcribing allowed me to develop a strong connection to the material and identify codes and themes presented in the material (Creswell & Poth, 2018; van Manen, 1997). During the focus groups, I also took notes of different observations I have seen from the participants. The coding process was completed by highlighting by hand. The coding and data analysis process showed

different themes and concerns regarding professional development and training in which teachers have participated and engaged.

The observation approach allowed me to understand the classroom setting and how teachers interact with students with ASD (van Manen, 1997). Observations primarily focused on the teacher to examine how students with ASD are connected in self-efficacy in planning and implementing academic lessons. The form allowed me to stay focused on the observations of teachers' interactions with students with ASD. I also timestamp each part of the observation. I will also note nonverbal interactions within each form element and record them with time stamps. After reviewing the form, I analyzed the data and looked for essential themes and recurrences.

Within this study, data synthesis was conducted upon gathering and analyzing all data collection information. I was able to analyze data from the interviews, the focus group, and observations will be synthesized using an interpretive approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interpretive approach follows many steps (van Manen, 1997). First, I gathered all my data from the one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and observations (van Manen, 1997). Second, I began coding like data (van Manen, 1997). Thirdly, I was able to cluster codes into themes to help answer the research questions (van Manen, 1997). The interpretative approach allows participants to discuss their feelings, experiences, and beliefs.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is significant when completing a research study. Developing a trustworthy study was essential for examining the lived experiences of teachers and paraprofessionals on how to teach and support students with ASD within the inclusion classroom. Trustworthiness was established through four main processes: credibility,

transferability, confirmability, and ethics. I was able to explore each factor in the following section.

Credibility

Credibility is confidence in the truth of the study's findings or the extent to which the results accurately describe reality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). When establishing credibility, a researcher must include prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer briefing, negative case analysis, referential adequacy, and member checking (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Within my study, I went through the IRB through Liberty University, which ensures that participants will experience minimal risk. Participants also knew every step of the process and were given a timeline of all events that participants would be going through (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). After consent has been collected, the teacher will be given a timeline that discusses the dates and times of interviews, focus groups, and observations. The data collection should take approximately two to three weeks to complete. This also allowed teachers to prepare and possibly express areas where they may need assistance and more guidance. Teachers also were given a notebook to allow them to write any questions and concerns that the participant may have.

Transferability

Transferability is defined as studies and research that can be used in other types of situations, populations, and contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My study may be applied and used by other scholars in many ways to benefit research. First, my study could be used to explore additional populations of educators in varied grade levels, settings, and subject areas. I have chosen to work with an urban charter school network because I have worked in urban charter schools for eight years; historically, urban schools do not receive the same professional

development benefits as middle-class suburban neighborhoods. Different communities and cultures can also be used to help advance this study.

Dependability

Regarding dependability, researchers need to see if the study could be repeated with similar findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This research study included procedures that gave step-by-step instructions, allowing peer researchers to duplicate this study. I also included how the participants were gathered and the charter schools' network demographics so similar communities can be compared or contrasted among findings.

Confirmability

Confirmability is confidence and staying neutral within the study and the findings (Shenton, 2004). One way that I made sure that this study was unbiased was by including the written transcripts of the entire interview. Regarding observations, I include my written notes from my research journal about only what was observed in the classroom and the teacher's interaction with the students with moderate to high-functioning ASD. The research journal was also used to ensure I was non-biased during the study, which helped constructively guide my thoughts. Remaining unbiased during the investigation is essential for any study to establish and maintain credibility (Simundić, 2013). My profession as an SEC did not interfere with the study because my position is not a leadership position, and I cannot conduct disciplinary actions nor hire or fire any staff members. My job as an SEC also does not allow me to put teachers on any performance plan. My job is strictly in compliance with managing individual education plans (IEPs) with the state and federal law and giving resources and other support to the general and special education teachers.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were implemented with fidelity throughout the study. The first step was going through the IRB process for Liberty University, in which I was permitted the site and the participants. After gaining approval from my institution, I then move forward with finding participants, ensuring ethical consideration throughout each step. The ethical processes are described in this section of the chapter.

Permissions

Before I began my study, I gained permission from different charter schools around the mid-Atlantic area to gain approval for emailing preschool teachers in an urban area (see Appendix C; see Appendix D). Once I gained the site approval in written form and submitted the official documents, I requested approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Liberty University (see Appendix A). Once I gained permission in written form, I gathered my participants and provided them with the consent form to approve (see Appendix B). For this study, participants included special education teachers, general education teachers, and paraprofessionals assigned to the classroom.

Other Participant Protections

Once participants were accepted, they were able to choose whether they wanted to participate in this study, and their identities were concealed using pseudonyms. Participants were also informed of all portions of the study and had frequent check-ins through email, text messages, and phone calls. Participants also knew why this study was being conducted and what this study was looking for as a conclusion. All information is on a password-sensitive computer that will be deleted three years after the investigation is finished. Participants' schools and supervisors were also named or given information. No pictures of students or participants will be

taken to conceal the identity of the school. All consent forms will be electronic and kept on a secure, password-protected computer. All documentation used in this study will be destroyed after three years.

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of utilizing professional resources to aid in the early childhood education development of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder for teachers at charter schools in a large city in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The study's purpose was to investigate through individual interviews, a focus group, and observations. All information was transcribed and coded by hand to become strongly connected with the material and identify the themes and sub-themes developed from the study data. Finally, exceptional care was taken to ensure the study was trustworthy and participants were protected.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of utilizing professional resources to aid in the early childhood education development of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder for teachers at charter schools in a large city in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. This chapter will present the results of my data analysis and findings. The chapter will contain participant descriptions, narrative themes, pictures, and the research question addressed during the study. Themes include the modern inclusion classroom, visual schedules, proximity, veteran special and general education teachers, and professional development and training. The researcher collected data through observations, one-on-one interviews, and a final focus group.

Participants

Participants in this study were paraprofessionals or paraeducators, special educators, and general education teachers in the prekindergarten classroom. All participants were 27 years to 65 years old. The participants in the study had various teaching experiences, ranging from novice to veteran teachers in the field. Novice educators had approximately six months of experience, while veteran teachers had about 25 years of experience in the education field. All participants in the study had experience teaching students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) within the prekindergarten inclusion setting. While all participants had experience in the inclusion setting, many educator participants also taught in other grade levels, supporting students in various grades and learning levels.

Anita

Anita has been teaching special education inside and outside the inclusion setting for 14 years and has a medium self-rating of working with students with autism. She has experience both as a general education teacher and as a special education teacher. Anita prefers working with young students and loves being creative, especially when developing lesson plans for her students. She loves thinking “outside the box” to assist scholars with their independent education plan (IEP) goals. She always plans hands-on and engaging activities that will help all the students learn, allowing her to monitor her students' progressive learning easily. Anita also works with other grade levels, including Kindergarten and 1st grade.

Cindy

Cindy has been a paraprofessional for three years within the general education setting. She has previously been a one-on-one or dedicated aide working with students with exceptional needs within the resource and inclusion setting. She works closely with the general education teacher within the room and actively assists all scholars in the space. Cindy can also co-teach with her general education teacher and often assists in planning lessons.

Lisa

Lisa has been a general education teacher for 12 years, taking a few breaks in teaching. She has worked on the early childhood education (ECE) team working as a prekindergarten teacher. This is Lisa’s first year working with students with ASD. Still, she is willing to learn and advocate for all students, ensuring each student is receiving the related services necessary for learning. Lisa strives to create a welcoming classroom where learning tools are accessible and labeled. She takes a hands-on approach and finds different ways to assist her students, even if she needs to develop an impromptu lesson plan for learning adaptation.

Bridget

Bridget has been working in special education for 11 years. Bridget has a master's in special education. She takes professional development outside of her school to ensure she has the best resources for her students with ASD and other disabilities. In her classroom, she has many different tools and fidgets to better assist her students in staying engaged. Bridget describes these tactics as supportive for students who need additional movement throughout the day.

Mary

Mary has 13 years of experience as a special education teacher and has worked with prekindergarten students for most of her career. Mary has also been an applied behavior analyst (ABA) specialist. She has experience working at the preschool level of learning as a general education teacher for three years before choosing a career in special education. Mary works closely with her general education co-teachers and assists them with developing modifications and accommodations for students within the inclusion setting.

Monica

Monica is a 17-year veteran special education teacher who describes herself as having a moderately high level of self-efficacy toward teaching within the inclusion classroom. Before being a special education teacher, she was a speech and language pathologist. Monica has also worked in her school's extended school year program, which has allowed her to work closely with students with ASD and other disabilities.

Chelsea

Chelsea has been working for 25 years as a paraprofessional in the general education classroom and expressed that this is her first year working with a student with ASD. She works closely with the general education teachers. Shen assists with teaching the curriculum. Chelsea

also works with small group learning and other interventions for general education students and students with ASD within the inclusion setting.

Erika

Erika has been working as a special education teacher for ten years and has a medium to high level of self-efficacy when working with students with ASD. She has also been a previous ABA specialist and uses techniques to assist her scholars with ASD within the classroom. She frequently modifies lesson plans and small assessments to match the student's IEP accommodations. Erika often does small groups within the classroom with a mix of general education students and students with disabilities.

Catherine

Catherine is a general education teacher with a beginner level of self-efficacy but has been working in the general education classroom for 11 years. She is currently the team leader for the ECE program. Before she worked in the classroom, she was an afterschool coordinator. Catherine has always worked with students in the prekindergarten setting and does well with classroom management and including all learners in the inclusion space. She advocates for her students, ensuring that the students with ASD are getting the services they need to grow.

Sara

Sara is a special education teacher who has been working in education for 25 years and has much experience working with students with ASD. She has a medium level of self-efficacy when she is working with students with ASD. Sara stated that she needs more professional development about modern ways to assist students with disabilities better because some of her techniques are outdated. She has worked with students with ASD and other learning disabilities

in different grade levels. She comes into the general education space and takes students out of the classroom and into the resource room to better assist with reading interventions.

Rebecca

Rebecca has been a general education teacher for one year but has been working in education as a paraprofessional for five years. This is her first year working with students with ASD, but she regularly seeks support from related service providers and the student support coordinator. In the classroom, she works with students using whole-group and small-group techniques with assistance from her paraprofessional and the special education teacher who comes into the classroom. Her classroom is organized and has different stations that students can visit. She also assists students with communication and advocates for students who need help.

Paul

Paul has been working in education as a paraprofessional within the setting for 6 months and has a beginner level of self-efficacy within the classroom. Before working in his current classroom, he was a substitute for various grade levels for 1 year. He stated that he loves talking with the students and having conversations with his students to get to know them. He wants to learn more about working with all students since this is his first year, and he sometimes gets assistance from Catherine for different resources to assist with behaviors.

Table 4

Teacher Participants

Teacher Participant	Years Taught	Teacher Type	Grade Level
Anita	14	Special Educator	Early Childhood
Cindy	3	Paraeducator	Early Childhood
Lisa	12	General Educator	Early Childhood
Bridget	11	Special Educator	Early Childhood
Mary	13	Special Educator	Early Childhood
Monica	17	Special Educator	Early Childhood
Chelsea	25	Paraeducator	Early Childhood
Ericka	10	Special Educator	Early Childhood
Catherine	10	General Educator	Early Childhood
Sara	25	Special Educator	Early Childhood
Rebecca	1	General Educator	Early Childhood
Paul	6 months	Paraeducator	Early Childhood

Results

When completing observations, one-on-one interviews, and the final focus group, it was noted that although the participant's school provided some training and professional development, there is still insufficient support and up-to-date training to assist students with ASD. Many participants explained that they are "learning as they go" and do a lot of "trial and error" when working with students with ASD. Participants often expressed needing more support and training outside the district's pre-professional development. Some teachers stated that they

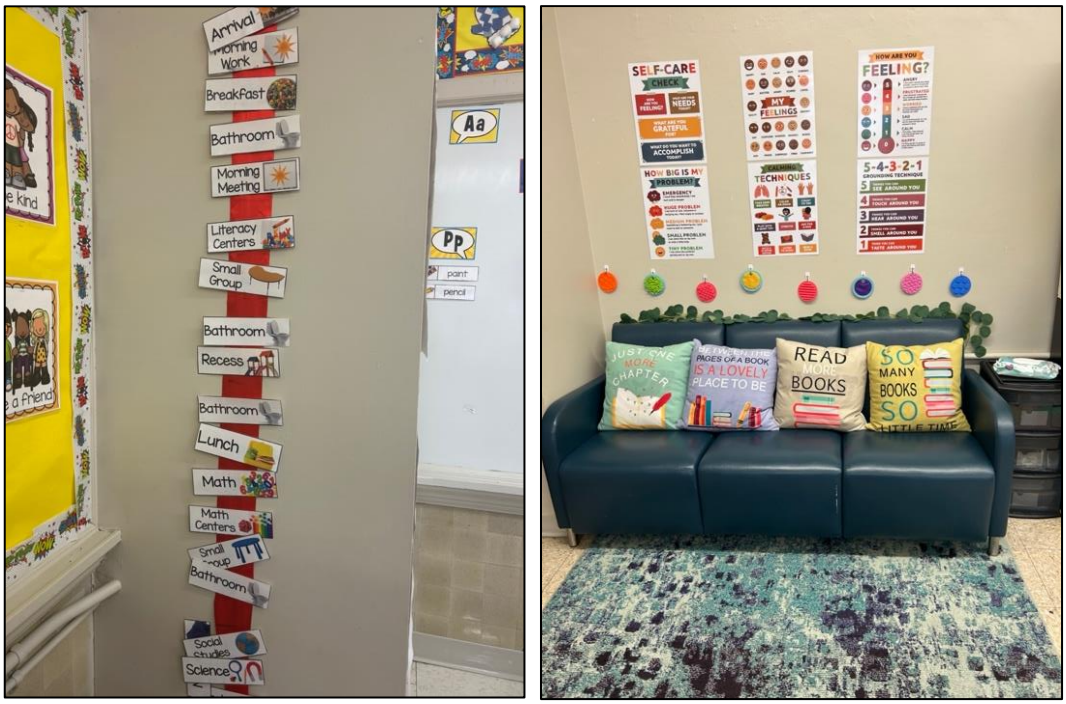
have never received professional development around students with ASD. The section will discuss the themes found in the study, including the modern inclusion classroom, the use of visual schedules, proximity, veteran general and special education teachers, and professional development and training.

Modern Inclusion Classroom

During observations, it was noted that the inclusion classrooms were welcoming and engaging for all students within the classroom. All the pre-kindergarten classrooms had an interactive whiteboard, different seating options such as bean bag chairs, game chairs, stools, or coaches, and many visuals on the walls. Visual schedules were set up in each classroom, and everything was labeled, including the sink, light, chair, door, and desk. The inclusion classrooms also used sensory and tactile items to assist with student focus. The items included weighted animals such as a weighted fox and teddy bear, weighted blankets, fidgets, and sensory pads. All classrooms within both schools included “calming corners,” allowing all students to reset and refocus if they were having difficulty behaviorally.

Figure 1

Classroom Images



Note. These figures show examples of commonly found labels and posters.

Visual Schedules

Anita, a special education teacher for 12 years, often used “first and then” language and utilized visual schedules taped on the students’ desks. The same was observed in the other four classrooms, where the teachers used large-sized schedules visible to students as they entered the classrooms. Many of the participants described redirecting students toward the schedule before any transition to another activity or leaving the classroom to go to a special such as music, art, or gym. On multiple occasions, it was observed that both the special and general education teachers and paraprofessionals would have to remind students of the transition consistently, "We will be cleaning up in 5 minutes,” and “We will be cleaning up in 4 minutes.” Cindy, who is a paraprofessional, had to take a student with ASD to the next activity 5 minutes earlier than the

rest of the students, so the students with ASD had more time to transition with support. Cindy also had a visual schedule around their neck so the students could see what would happen next.

Proximity

All general and special education teachers were observed in proximity to students with ASD. Anita's observation within the inclusion classroom showed that the special education teacher stayed close to the student to restate directions and assist with math. In another instance, Chelsea, a paraprofessional, would also host a small group of students to help with their academics and behaviors of students. During carpet learning time, when educators came together with their students to either read a story or go over whole group teaching instruction, all teachers would be with the students to assist with body regulation, such as redirecting students back to their seats if they got up or using a weighted stuffed animal to help with overstimulation. Anita shared, "I need to be close to the students so I can monitor their progress while they are working. I modify classwork to better fit their needs for different subjects."

Veteran Special and General Education Teachers

During the interview, it was shared that most special education teachers have 10-plus years of experience working in the inclusion setting. All special education teacher participants have previously worked 1 - 3 years as a general education teacher and chose to move to special education due to wanting to assist students who have disabilities. Two participants had their master's degree in special education and were exploring professional development outside the district and the school where they currently reside. During one-on-one interviews, it was shared that Mary and Erika also had ABA therapy training and experience. For example, Mary shared, "Working as an ABA technician, I was able to use the skills and different behavioral techniques to assist with scholars having a hard time."

It was also observed that Anita would assist the general education teacher with behaviors so the general education teacher would not trigger a student using vocabulary different from the commonly used terms “first and then” and the necessity of visual schedules. During observations, if students became overstimulated, the participant would allow students to have a “brain break.” All co-teachers observed together had clear communication skills throughout the observation, so if students needed extra assistance, the class would remain uninterrupted. During the focus group, a general education teacher expressed that they have not had any training or previous professional developments on how to work with students with ASD, but working with special education teachers with a lot of experience did assist them in making a better environment for the students with ASD. “I use a lot of tools that Mary has suggested to me. This includes how to talk to students with ASD and that sometimes I need to be more patient in their growth (Catherine, 2024)”.

Professional Development and Training

Professional development and training are critical for teacher development within the inclusion classroom. During a one-on-one interview, Bridget explained that their current school has some professional developments that “scratch the surface,” but there needs to be more due to how education has been progressing. The participant also stated that the district needs to be involved in professional development about accepting students with ASD within the inclusion classroom.

Similarly, Mary, a special education teacher, said, “My school has general professional development but needs more specific to special education and different strategies to assist students with ASD.” This also relates to Bridget, a special education teacher who shared, “The school I work at only scratches the surface of working with students with disabilities.” Mary also

mentioned that it is essential for general education teachers to be part of professional development and training to learn about students with different disabilities, especially students with ASD. This allows general education teachers to gain more insight and to be more invested in their students to provide more support.

From a paraprofessional standpoint, Sara explained that in their 25 years of experience, there have been more students who now have the classification of ASD. Sara also stated that more professional development for students with ASD is critical because more support is needed within the inclusion classroom. Sara also expressed that there needs to be more training to learn different techniques to better assist with helping students both academically and behaviorally within the classroom. Similarly, Bridget stated that in-person training would help get more ideas about other games or engaging activities that can assist students with ASD.

Outlier Data and Findings

During interviews and the focus groups, an unexpected theme arose, which also caused more discussion during the focus group. The participants discussed the inconsistency of related service providers, which was explained as hindering the student's progress in the classroom. Participants shared how the inconsistencies upset parents and show that students cannot reach their full potential regarding speech, behavior, and academics.

Inconsistent Support

During one-on-one interviews, it was shared that outside-related service providers were not always consistent when giving support to students with ASD within the inclusion setting. Lisa stated that the student's ABA schedule was inconsistent, "The ABA is very beneficial, but due to the absences of the therapist and the schedule for providing services is very choppy and random, I feel like the student is not making the growth they should be." Lisa explained that the

student needs these services to remain regulated and to follow his routine. This was also mentioned by another participant, Catherine, who also expressed the inconsistencies of related service providers when servicing students with ASD and how, at times, the student regresses academically and behaviorally due to the inconsistency.

Research Question Responses

The research questions were guided by the problem and purpose of this study to describe the experiences utilizing professional resources to aid in the development of early childhood education of children diagnosed with ASD for teachers at charter schools. Further, the research questions specifically align with the components of the theoretical framework. Elements of Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory focus on the person, the behavior, and the environment.

Central Research Question

How do early childhood education teachers describe their experiences utilizing supportive resources within the general classroom to aid in the academic development of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder? The special education teachers who have been teaching for a long time have a lot of resources that they use within the classroom. However, the downside is that special education is constantly changing, so the participants do not have the most up-to-date resources to assist students better. Most general education participants have difficulty getting to know the students and how to help with their behaviors. “I wished that before the administration put students with ASD in my classroom, I was given a heads up so I could ask for resources to better assist the scholars,” Lisa said. Lisa also explained that she had trouble getting to know her students who have ASD because they were put in her class without warning or any training to assist her.

Sub-Question One

How do early childhood education teachers describe their self-efficacy in teaching children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder in the general classroom? Most of the teachers were veteran teachers, but this was the first year many participant educators had students with ASD in the classroom. Thus, perceptions of self-efficacy were often low. Even some special education teachers with over 10 years of experience still felt they only had a moderate level of self-efficacy because their training was from a long time ago, and there was not enough up-to-date training. Due to the lack of resources given to the teachers, all participants explained it was up to them to get what they needed based on their interactions with the children. Monica and Erika shared that they have a higher level of efficacy because they have training from outside their current school and a history of working with students with ASD. Before becoming a special education teacher, Monica was a speech and language pathologist, which helped her learn how to communicate non-verbally with students who have ASD. “Being an ABA really did help me working with the students I have now, especially when it comes to the behaviors and tantrums that the students may exhibit,” said Monica.

Sub-Question Two

How do early childhood education teachers describe their access to professional development opportunities that aid in the academic development of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder in the general classroom? During the focus group and interviews, it was shared that they do not have access to professional development opportunities, and most of the time, they are “winging it” with what they research on their own and, at times, are “building the plane as they go.” The participants communicated that they wanted to learn and participate in training and professional development because they felt like students with ASD would have

much more academic and behavioral growth. Monica, who has a moderate to high level of self-efficacy, explained that she has her masters degree in special education and finds her professional development to go to. However, she still felt like she lacked resources from the school for working with students with ASD. Monica explained, “I went to school a long time ago, and education is always changing, so the ways that I learned are now outdated. There are new resources and new programs to assist scholars with ASD.”

Sub-Question Three

How do early childhood education teachers describe the attitudes surrounding supportive resources in teaching children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder in the general classroom? Teacher participants in this study expressed that they are tired and feeling frustrated because they are not getting resources to assist students with ASD. General education teachers rely on special education teachers in their learning or research. Still, the participants have not received official training from the school where they work. Most participants discussed with the researcher that the school provides many professional developments for teachers, but none discussed ASD or special education. Anita, Bridget, and Monica stated, “The professional developments at our school and district only pertain to general educators. There is nothing significant for special education and learning about new techniques or software that can assist scholars with ASD.

Summary

Based on the examined data, teachers feel somewhat supported in school. All participants explained that there could be more support for staff members around different disabilities, especially when it comes to students with ASD. Teachers want more professional development and have people attend the schools to assist with training. It was also mentioned that more

resources and tools should be used in the classroom so that teachers do not use their money for different instructional and sensory items. Teacher self-efficacy with working with students with ASD ranged from low to medium-high. No teacher observed or interviewed had a perception of high efficacy self-rating due to education constantly changing and new techniques being developed.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of utilizing professional resources to aid in the early childhood education development of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder for teachers at charter schools in a large city in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. This portion of the dissertation will discuss the following: interpretation of findings, implications for policy and practice, theoretical and methodological implications, limitations and delimitations, and recommendations for future research. The chapter will end with a conclusion of the study.

Discussion

The findings of this study highlighted the limitation of self-concepts associated with developing or modifying lesson plans to support the education of students with ASD within the inclusion classroom setting. Unfortunately, teacher experience did not create immunity to the scope of limited self-efficacy in helping students with ASD. This portion of the chapter discusses the study's findings as expressed through the developed themes. The discussion includes five major subsections: the interpretation of findings based on the interviews, focus groups, and observations. These findings allowed me to answer my research questions while developing implications for policy, practice, and future research guidance.

Summary of Thematic Findings

An understanding of teacher self-efficacy relating to the use of professional resources to aid in the early childhood education development of children diagnosed with ASD is a significant factor in describing the lived experiences of my participants. Teacher participants candidly discussed how they felt teaching students with ASD within the classroom based on their

confidence level and their experience working with students with ASD. Even though most participants had many years of experience, they did not feel supported by administrators within the school, which limited their perception of self-efficacy. My findings exposed themes such as the modern inclusion classroom, visual schedules, proximity, veteran special and general education teachers, and professional development and training that allowed me to interpret the findings of this study.

Interpretation of Findings

All 12 participants eagerly completed observations, a one-on-one interview, and a final focus group where everyone came together to discuss professional developments and training that benefited them from the past and what they would like to see more of from their school. The themes observed were using the modern inclusion setting or co-teaching model, proximity to the students with ASD and other disabilities, visual schedules, veteran teachers, and professional development and training. Developing such themes led to the interpretations of the findings as their levels of self-efficacy and how they modified the classroom and activities for students with ASD. The following themes were found using observations, one-on-one interviews, and the final focus group.

Levels of Self-Efficacy

Many of the special education teacher participants were veteran educators in the field. All special education teacher participants shared that they have moderate to high levels of self-efficacy when teaching students with ASD. When special education teachers understand how to work with students with ASD, they can share that knowledge with the general education teacher. Chelsea has over 25 years of experience, but this is their first-time teaching students with ASD. The participants stated that they used what they already knew about students who had ASD in

the past and their relationship with the student to assist the student's needs better. Chelsea stated that students with ASD would thrive more academically and socially if administrators gave more support and tools for teachers to use instead of coming up with tools on their own.

Paul was a new teacher and had only been teaching for 6 months in the prekindergarten inclusion setting. Even though the participant was a novice to the profession and perceived limited self-efficacy, the classroom was enriched with a positive conversation that the participant encouraged between the students. The classroom environment was bright and had open centers where all students could communicate with each other. Even further, it seems that the teacher can assist students with problem-solving. Both Paul and Lisa stated they want more resources, techniques, and support for the classroom because they are not trained or went to school to work with students with ASD. Paul and Lisa shared that there is so much to learn about students with disabilities, and he is willing to learn if the school provides a training series and professional development.

Modification for Students with ASD

When teachers were asked about how they feel about creating modified lesson plans for students with ASD, some teachers stated that it gives them stress or anxiety, and a few participants noted that it allowed them to be creative and think "outside of the box." Erika and Anita explained that they enjoyed modifying and developing lesson plans for students with ASD because it allowed them to think about what exactly a student needs and what they need more assistance with. The special education teacher participants discussed that they use many different types of resources to develop goals, monitor progress, and track data. One resource used and purchased by the school's district for special education teachers was the Goal Book. It also gave

ideas on engaging games and social and emotional assistance that directly align with students with ASD.

Similarly, many professionals, a general education teacher and two special education teacher participants stated that they struggled with creating lesson plans for students with ASD. One reason there is a struggle is that they have not been trained in developing such lesson plans and do not know the skills associated with modifying lesson plans for students with ASD. Another reason is that the students with ASD needs are more significant, especially when it comes to behavior, so sometimes it is difficult for teachers to get through an entire lesson.

Implication for Policy and Practice

Based on the information gathered from the focus group and one-on-one interviews, there were a few suggestions for leaders of the districts, administrators, and instructional coaches to assist teachers better when working with students with ASD. With these suggestions, it is possible for all teachers and paraprofessionals to feel supported within the inclusion classroom. Applying these suggestions may guide educators in the prekindergarten inclusion setting to feel more supported and feel they are making a positive difference within the school, allowing more growth for students with ASD.

Implications for Policy

The research findings imply that training and other professional development must be regularly provided to all teachers, paraprofessionals, and staff members. These trainings must come from the district levels, which will go directly to each school. Schools can only implement what a district, country, or state will allow and pay for. Having school districts, states, and counties invest in the learning and funding of supporting students with ASD is critical to helping teachers develop the skills to assist students with ASD within the prekindergarten school setting.

Participants stated they have been spending money to buy their students' subscriptions and materials. Still, this money needs to come from the districts along with training to understand how to use the different materials, curriculum, and subscription.

Implications for Practice

Based on the information the participants gave during the interviews and focus group, there needs to be more training for staff members, including administration, when working with students with ASD. It is recommended that there is frequent training where presenters come in and engage with teachers on how to assist students with ASD. Teachers know that education is changing, and more students are being diagnosed with ASD. Still, for them to be efficient, teachers need to understand different techniques, tools, and strategies to assist students within the inclusion classroom, which may be more beneficial to the students.

Empirical and Theoretical Implications

There are overlapping findings and implications in this study compared to previous literature. Social cognitive theory (SCT) was the best fit for this study in finding the answers to the research questions. Using the SCT framework allowed an objective standpoint on what general and special education feel when teaching students within the inclusion prekindergarten classroom.

Empirical Implications

Previous studies have also noted the need for more professional development within the inclusion setting (Francisco et al. & Odem et al., 2018). The participants expressed that they do not feel supported within the classroom and need more support from the administration. During the focus group, the participants stated that if they received the proper training, the students would benefit more from the inclusion setting and learn more. Such findings align with

Francisco et al. (2018) and Odem et al. (2018) when supporting teachers with various support sources aiding in continued student achievement. Specifically, scaffolding is a standard system used among educators of students with and without ASD (Francisco et al. & Odem et al., 2018).

Theoretical Implications

I employed social cognitive theory (SCT) (Bandura, 1986) to explore the lived experiences of special education teachers, general education teachers, and paraprofessionals working with students with ASD in the inclusion classroom. SCT explains how behavior can determine a person's success through the environment (Bandura, 1986). Using observations, one-on-one interviews, and focus groups, all participants could share their true feelings about working with young students in early childhood education with ASD. Bridget stated that she has a moderate level of self-efficacy in teaching students with ASD and was aware of and used some high-leverage practices, but they are not skilled in applying them yet. This finding directly aligns with the behavioral factor of SCT (Bandura, 1986). Specifically, Bridget mentioned that she considers her self-efficacy in teaching students with ASD moderate and could use more professional development and resources to assist her in the classroom better.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations and delimitations were present within this study. Limitations from this study included unforeseen circumstances pausing data collection. Delimitations included the type of data collection methods utilized to explore the lived experiences of my participants. While such delimitations were present, the methods allowed for the lived experiences of my participants to be examined to add to the body of knowledge.

Limitations

Two limitations are considered in this study. The first limitation was the choice of two participants to leave the study. One participant experienced medical issues, and the other was limited in time due to standardized testing necessities. The second limitation of this study was the rescheduling of data collection appointments due to unforeseen issues with the weather and illness. At one point, the weather delayed me from attending the school for an observation, which required me to reschedule. In addition, four observations were rescheduled to ensure that the illness I was experiencing was not shared with the classroom. Finally, the focus group was rescheduled twice to support the needs of the participants. While unavoidable, the delay in rescheduling may have affected the findings and information the participants could share at the new meeting time.

Delimitations

Delimitations of this study surrounded the data collection methods and criteria necessary for participants to meet for consideration of participation in the study. First, this study was qualitative, utilizing interviews, a focus group, and observations, which took significant time. Using a survey or questionnaire may have supported a swifter data collection process. Second, the participants were all prekindergarten classroom-age paraprofessionals, special education teachers, or general education teachers, limiting the scope of lived experience findings to such educators. However, such a decision allowed the exploration of the particular participants to add to the body of knowledge.

Recommendations for Future Research

Considering the study findings, limitations, and delimitations placed on the study, here are recommendations for future research. Additional research on topics like this study should

consider expanding the geographic location and widening the scope of understanding to various regions. In addition, expanding the study to include additional grade-level teachers will provide further insight into the perceptions of educators supporting students with ASD in the inclusion classroom setting. Different grade-level analyses will allow for further exploration of how teachers feel when working with students with ASD.

Another recommendation includes broadening the participants to instructional coaches. Broadening this subject matter will allow a deeper understanding of incorporating instructional practices within the curriculum. Such an expansion may also enable instructional coaches to learn how to make the curriculum more inclusive for students with ASD within different grade levels, allowing for more assistance for special education teachers.

Conclusion

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of utilizing professional resources to aid in the early childhood education development of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder for teachers at charter schools in a large city in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The findings of this study exposed the limitation of self-concept associated with creating and modifying lesson plans to support the education of students with ASD in the inclusion classroom. This study found that teacher experience did not exempt such teachers from a limited scope of self-efficacy in supporting students with ASD. Thus, it is recommended that additional training and support be provided to educators at schools with inclusion settings to support student needs and learning effectively.

References

Able, H., Sreckovic, M. A., Schultz, T. R., Garwood, J. D., & Sherman, J. (2015). Views from the trenches: Teacher and student support needed for full inclusion of students with ASD. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 38*(1), 44 57. https://doi.org/10.1177/0888406414558096

Accardo, A. L., & Finnegan, E. G. (2019). Teaching reading comprehension to learners with autism spectrum disorder: Discrepancies between teacher and research- recommended Practices. Autism. *The International Journal of Research and Practice, 23*(1), 236-246. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361317730744

Afacan, K. (2020). Reading Comprehension Interventions for Students with Intellectual Disability: A Systematic Literature Review. *Ozel Egitim Dergisi, 21*(4), 821-846. https://doi.org/10.21565/ozelegitimdergisi.557692

Agarwal, P. K. (2019). Retrieval practice & Bloom's taxonomy: Do students need fact knowledge before higher-order learning? *Journal of Educational Psychology, 111*(2), 189-209. https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000282

Alexander, M., & Byrd, D. R. (2020). Investigating special education teachers' knowledge and skills: Preparing general teacher preparation for professional development. *Journal of Pedagogical Research, 4*(2), 72-82. https://doi.org/10.33902/JPR.2020059790

Al Jaffal, M. (2022). Barriers general education teachers face regarding the inclusion of students with autism. *Frontiers in Psychology, 13*, 873248-873248.

Almeida, C. M., Jameson, J. M., Riesen, T., & McDonnell, J. (2016). Urban and rural pre-service special education teachers' computer uses and perceptions of self-

Efficacy. *Rural Special Education Quarterly*, *35*(3), 12-19. https://doi.org/10.1177/875687051603500303

Anderson, C. M., Iovannone, R., Smith, T., Levato, L., Martin, R., Cavanaugh, B., Hochheimer, S., Wang, H., & Iadarola, S. (2021). Thinking Small to Think Big: Modular Approach for Autism Programming in Schools (MAAPS). *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, *51*(1), 193–211. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-020-04532-1

Ari, A. (2011). Finding Acceptance of Bloom's Revised Cognitive Taxonomy on the International Stage and in Turkey. *Kuram Ve Uygulamada Egitim Bilimleri, 11*(2), 767-772.

Aylward, E. & Neilsen- Hewett, C. (2021). Application of an Evidence-based early intervention model for children with ASD in mainstream early childhood education and care setting via a targeted professional development program. *Australasian Journal of Special and Inclusive Education, 45*(2), 135- 149. doi:10.1017/jsi.2021.11

Balaz, L., Byrne, M. K., & Miellet, S. (2022). "Understanding our peers": A naturalistic program to facilitate social inclusion for children with autism in mainstream early childhood services. *International Journal of Disability, Development, and Education, 69*(5), 1583-1600. https://doi.org/10.1080/1034912X.2020.1821872

Bandura, A. (1986). *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Bloom, B. (1956). *Taxonomy of educational objectives: The Classification of educational goals Handbook 1*, Cognitive Domain. New York, NY: David McKay.

Bolourian, Y., Losh, A., Hamsho, N., Eisenhower, A., & Blacher, J. (2021). General education teachers' perceptions of autism, inclusive practices, and relationship-building strategies. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 52*(9), 3977-3990. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-021-05266-4

Casagrande, K.A., & Ingersoll, B.R. (2017). Service Delivery Outcomes is ASD: Role of parent education, empowerment, and professional partnerships. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 26*(9), 2386-2395). https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-017-0759-8

Cheek, A. E., Rock, M. L., & Jimenez, B. A. (2019). Online Module Plus eCoaching: The Effects on Special Education Teachers' Comprehension Instruction for Students with Significant Intellectual Disability. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities, 54*(4), 343-357.

Ciampa, K. (2017). Building bridges between technology and content literacy in special education: Lessons learned from special educators' use of integrated technology and perceived benefits for students. *Literacy Research and Instruction, 56(2*), 85-113. https://doi.org/10.1080/19388071.2017.1280863

Clausen, A. M., Wakeman, S., Johnson, H., & Reyes, E. N. (2022). Professional development needs reported by general education teachers at inclusive private Christian schools. *Journal of Research on Christian Education, ahead-of-print*(ahead-of-print), 1-18 https://doi.org/10.1080/10656219.2022.2096274

Conderman, G., & Hedin, L. (2017). Differentiating study guides. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 53*(1), 19-27. https://doi.org/10.1177/1053451217692799

Corona, L. L., Christodulu, K. V., & Rinaldi, M. L. (2017). Investigation of school professionals' self-efficacy for working with students with ASD: Impact of prior experience,

knowledge, and training. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions, 19*(2), 90-1 01. https://doi.org/10.1177/1098300716667604

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE.

Crompton, H., Burke, D., & Lin, Y. (2019). Mobile learning and student cognition: A systematic review of PK-12 research using Bloom's taxonomy. *British Journal of Educational Technology, 50*(2), 684-701. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjet.12674

Dewey, J (1938) The Theory of Inquiry. New York: Henry Hold and Company.

D'Entremont, B., Flanagan, H. E., Ungar, W. J., Waddell, C., Garon, N., Otter, J. d., Leger, N., Vezina, F., & Smith, I. M. (2022). Comparing the impact of differing preschool autism interventions on parents in two Canadian provinces. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 52*(11), 5018-5032. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-021-05349-2

Evans, B. (2014). The foundations of autism: The law concerning psychotic, schizophrenic, and autistic children in 1950s and 1960s Britain. *Bulletin of the History of Medicine, 88*(2), 253-286.

Finlay, C. Kinsella, W., & Prendeville, P. (2019). The professional development needs of primary teachers in special classes for children with autism in the Republic of Ireland. *Professional Development in Education, 48*(2), 233-2 53. https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2019.1696872

Fletcher-Watson S, McConnell F, Manola E, McConachie H. Interventions based on the Theory of Mind cognitive model for autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Cochrane Database Syst Rev. 2014 Mar 21; 2014(3):CD008785.

https://doi.org/10.1002/14651858.CD008785.pub2

Fonseca Amorim, G., Balestrassi, P. P., Sawhney, R., de Oliveira-Abans, M., & Ferreira da Silva, Diogo Leonardo. (2018). Six Sigma learning evaluation model using Bloom's. taxonomy. *International Journal of Lean Six Sigma, 9*(1), 156-174. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJLSS-01-2017-0006

Francisco, M. P. B., Hartman, M., & Wang, Y. (2020). Inclusion and special education. *Education Sciences, 10*(9), 238. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci10090238

Gee, K., & Gonsier-Gerdin, J. (2018). The first year as teachers assigned to elementary and middle-school special education classrooms. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, 43*(2), 94-110. https://doi.org/10.1177/1540796918771708

Gilmour A. F., & Wehby, J. H. (2020). The association between teaching students with disabilities and teacher turnover. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 112*(5), 1042-1060. https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000394

Gómez-Marí, I., Sanz-Cervera, P., & Tárraga-Mínguez, R. (2021). Teachers' knowledge regarding autism spectrum disorder (ASD): A systematic review. *Sustainability (Basel, Switzerland), 13*(9), 5097. https://doi.org/10.3390/su13095097

Gunderson, J. L., Higgins, K., Morgan, J. J., Tandy, R., & Brown, M. R. (2017). Cognitively accessible academic lessons for students with intellectual disabilities using the iPad. *Journal of Special Education Technology, 32*(4), 187-198. https://doi.org/10.1177/0162643417715750

Ho, F. C., Lam, C. S., Sam, S. K., & Arthur-Kelly, M. (2018). An exploratory study on collaborative modes of professional development and learning for teachers of students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD): Collaborative modes of professional development

and learning. *Support for Learning, 33*(2), 142-164. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467 9604.12199

Huang, C., Chen, K., Lee, K., Lin, C., & Chen, K. (2023). Correction: Different autism measures targeting different severity levels in children with autism spectrum disorder. *European Archives of Psychiatry and Clinical Neuroscience,* https://doi.org/10.1007/s00406-023-01703-w

Hume, K., Sam, A., Irina, M., Reszka, S., & Boyd, B. A. (2019). Facilitating social interactions with peers in specialized early childhood settings for Young Children With ASD. *School Psychology Review, 48*(2), 123-132. https://doi.org/10.17105/SPR-2017-0134.V48-2

Imasaka, T., Lee, P. L., Anderson, A., Wong, C. W. R., Moore, D. W., Furlonger, B., & Bussaca M. (2019). Improving Compliance in Primary School Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Journal of Behavioral Education,* 1-24. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10864-019-09346-5

Jury, M., Perrin, A., Desombre, C., & Rohmer, O. (2021). Teachers' attitudes toward the inclusion of students with autism spectrum disorder: Impact of students' difficulties. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders, 83,* 101746. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rasd.2021.101746

Juvonen, J., Lessard, L. M., Rastogi, R., Schacter, H. L., & Smith, D. S. (2019). Promoting social inclusion in educational settings: Challenges and opportunities. *Educational Psychologist, 54*(4), 250-270. https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2019.1655645

Kaimara, P., Deliyannis, I., Oikonomou, A., & Fokides, E. (2021). Waking up in the morning (WUIM): A Smart Learning Environment for Students with Learning Difficulties. *Technologies, 9*(3), 50. https://doi.org/10.3390/technologies9030050

Katz, J., Sokal, L. & Wu, A. (2021). Academic achievement of diverse K-12 in inclusive three block model of classrooms. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 25*(12), 1391-140. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2019.1613450

Kelly, L. M., & Cordeiro, M. (2020). Three principles of pragmatism for research on organizational processes. *Methodological Innovations, 13*(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/2059799120937242

Kim, S., Cambray-Engstrom, E., Wang, J., Kang, V. Y., Choi, Y., & Coba-Rodriguez, S. (2020). Teachers' experiences, attitudes, and perceptions towards early inclusion in urban settings. *Inclusion (Washington, D.C.), 8*(3), 222-240. https://doi.org/10.1352/2326-6988-8.3.222

Kirkham, P. (2017). ‘The line between intervention and abuse’ – autism and applied behaviour analysis. *History of the Human Sciences, 30*(2), 107-126. https://doi.org/10.1177/0952695117702571

Kisbu-Sakarya, Y., & Doenyas, C. (2021). Can schoolteachers’ willingness to teach ASD inclusion classes be increased via special education training? uncovering mediating mechanisms. *Research in Developmental Disabilities, 113*, 103941-103941.

Krathwohl, D. R. (2002). A revision of Bloom's taxonomy: An overview. *Theory into Practice, 41*(4), 212-218. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ridd.2021.103941

Latorre-Cosculluela, C., Liesa-Orús, M., & Rivera-Torres, P. (2022). Opportunities to learn for children with autism spectrum disorders: Effects of the perceived efficacy of teacher

practices and drivers of inclusion. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 37*(2), 108-119. https://doi.org/10.1177/10883576211073692

Lai, M., Dr, Lombardo, M. V., PhD, & Baron-Cohen, S., Prof. (2014). autism. *The Lancet (British Edition), 383*(9920), 896-910. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(13)61539-1

Lee, V. J., Tecce DeCarlo, M. J., Grant, A., & Neuman, D. (2021). A collaborative I-LEARN project with kindergarten and second-grade urban teachers and students at a university assisted school. *Urban Education*, *56*(1), 123–153. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085916677344

Lee, G. T., He, L., & Xu, S. (2022). Using cooperative physical activities in inclusive settings to enhance social interactions for preschoolers with autism spectrum disorder in China. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions, 24*(3), 236-249. https://doi.org/10.1177/10983007211035135

Levy, S. E., Prof, Mandell, D. S., ScD, & Schultz, R. T., Prof. (2009). Autism.m. *Lancet, 374*(9701), 1627-1638. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(09)61376-3

Llauradó E.V., Martín Martínez, L., & Martín Cruz, I. (2020). Analysis of ASD Classrooms: Specialized Open Classrooms in the Community of Madrid. Sustainability, *12*(18), 7342. https://doi.org/10.3390/su12187342

Lynch, F. L., Bulkley, J. E., Varga, A., Crawford, P., Croen, L. A., Daida, Y. G., Fombonne, E., Hatch, B., Massolo, M., & Dickerson, J. F. (2023). The impact of autism spectrum disorder on parent employment: Results from the r-Kids study. *Autism Research, 16*(3), 642-652. https://doi.org/10.1002/aur.2882

Mangope, Otukile-Mongwaketse, M., Dinama, B., & Kuyini, A. B. (2018). Teaching Practice Experiences in Inclusive Classrooms: The Voices of University of Botswana Special Education Student Teachers. *International Journal of Whole Schooling, 14*(1).

Markodimitraki, M., Ampartzaki, M., Krpriotaki, M., & Linardakis, M. (2017). Twin brothers with autism and their intra-pair interactions in a pre-school special education class. *Early Child Development and Care, 187*(12), 1938-1947. https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2016.1199375

Maseri, M., Mamat, M., Yew, H. T., & Chekima, A. (2021). The implementation of application software to improve verbal communication in children with autism spectrum disorder: A review. *Children (Basel), 8*(11), 1001. https://doi.org/10.3390/children8111001

Mazon, C., Etchegoyhen, K., Saint-Supery, I., Amestoy, A., Bouvard, M., Consel, C., Sauzéon, H. (2022). Fostering parents-professional collaboration for facilitating the school inclusion of students with ASD: Design of the "ToGather" web-based prototype. *Educational Technology Research and Development, 70*(1), 231 262. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-021-10073-w

McClain, M. B., Harris, B., Haverkamp, C. R., Golson, M. E., & Schwartz, S. E. (2019). The ASKSP revised (ASKSP-R) as a measure of ASD knowledge for professional. Populations. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 50*(3), 998-1006. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-019-04321-5

McKenna, J. W., Solis, M., Brigham, F., & Adamson, R. (2019). *The responsible inclusion of students receiving special education services for emotional disturbance: Unraveling the practice to research gap.* SAGE Publications.

Miled, N. (2019). Educational leaders' perceptions of multicultural education in teachers' professional development: a case study from a Canadian school district. *Multicultural Education Review, 11:2,* 79-95. https://doi.org/10.1080/2005615X.2019.1615249

Mohammed Taresh, S., Aniza Ahmad, N., Roslan, S., Ma'rof, A. M., & Mohammed Zaid, S. (2020). Mainstream Preschool Teachers' Skills at Identifying and Referring Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). *International journal of environmental research and public health*, *17*(12), 4284. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17124284

Mohsen Nassiri Toosi Orcid, Orcid, M. A., Orcid, M. k., Orcid, M. A., Orcid, Z. A., & Orcid, R.A. (2021). Looking at the levels of Bloom's taxonomy in a flipped classroom utilizing study guide and interactive assignment for undergraduate medical students. *Acta Medica Iranica*, *58*(12), 649. https://doi.org/10.18502/acta.v58i12.5157

Moreno Sandoval, C. D., Hernández Saca, D. I., & Tefera, A. A. (2021). Intersectional rights of teachers and students in computer science and special education: Implications for urban schooling. *Urban Education (Beverly Hills, Calif.)*, *56*(5), 675-704. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085917714512

Morin, K. L., Nowell, S., Steinbrenner, J., Sam, A., Waters, V., & Odom, S. L. (2022). A survey of the experiences of paraprofessionals with roles, training, and communication when Working with students with autism. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 37*(2), 96-107. https://doi.org/10.1177/10883576211066897

Myburgh, L., Condy, J., & Barnard, E. (2020). Pedagogical approaches to develop social skills of learners with autism spectrum disorder: Perceptions of three foundations phase teachers. *Perspectives in Education*, *38*(2), 241-254. https://doi.org/10.18820/2519593X/pie.v38.i2.16

Odom, S. L. (2019). Peer-based interventions for children and youth with autism spectrum disorder: History and effects. *School Psychology Review, 48*(2), 170 176. https://doi.org/10.17105/SPR-2019-0019.V48-2

Odom, S. L., Cox, A., Sideris, J., Hume, K. A., Hedges, S., Kucharczyk, S., Shaw, E., Boyd, B. A., Reszka, S., & Neitzel, J. (2018). Assessing quality of Program Environments for Children and Youth with Autism: Autism Program Environment Rating Scale (APERS). *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 48*(3), 913-924. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-017-3379-7

Osman, D. J., & Warner, J. R. (2020). Measuring teacher motivation: The missing link between professional development and practice. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 92*, 103064. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2020.103064

Ouellette, R. R., Frazier, S. L., Shernoff, E. S., Cappella, E., Mehta, T. G., Maríñez-Lora, A., Cua, G., & Atkins, M. S. (2017). Teacher job stress and satisfaction in urban schools: Disentangling individual-, classroom-, and organizational-level influences. *Behavior Therapy, 49*(4), 494-508. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.beth.2017.11.011

Ozyilmaz, A., Erdogan, B., & Karaeminogullari, A. (2018). Trust in organization as a moderator of the relationship between self-efficacy and workplace outcomes: A social cognitive theory-based examination. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, 91*(1), 181-204. https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.12189

Panganiban, J. L., Shire, S. Y., Williams, J., & Kasari, C. (2022). Supporting peer engagement for low-income preschool students with autism spectrum disorder during academic instruction: A pilot randomized trial. *Autism: The International Journal of Research.* https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613221085339

Peterson Bloom, L. (2021). Professional development for enhancing autism spectrum Disorder awareness in preschool professionals. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 51*(3), 950-960. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-020-04562-9

Pikhart, M., & Klimova, B. (2019). Utilization of linguistic aspects of bloom's taxonomy in blended learning. *Education Sciences, 9*(3). https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci9030235

Reddy, L. A., Lekwa, A., & Shernoff, E. (2021). Comparison of the effects of coaching for general and special education teachers in high-poverty urban elementary schools. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 54*(1), 36-53. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022219420970194

Reese, L., Richards-Tutor, C., Hansuvadha, N., Pavri, S., & Xu, S. (2018). Teachers for Inclusive, Diverse Urban Settings. *Issues in Teacher Education, 27*(1), 17-27.

Rozalski, M., Yell, M. L., & Warner, J. (2021). Free appropriate public education, the U.S. supreme court, and developing and implementing individualized education programs. *Laws, 10*(2), 38. https://doi.org/10.3390/laws10020038

Ryan, A., & Mathews, E. S. (2022). Teacher self-efficacy of primary school teachers working in Irish ASD classes. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 37*(2), 249-263. https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2021.1872996

Saxena, R., Agarwal, C., & Ganguly, S. (2021). Application of the Bloom's Taxonomy model of teaching and learning in character education for designing effective program. *Academy of Marketing Studies Journal*, 25(6), 1-12.

Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies from ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research project. *Education for Information, 22(2),* 53-75. https://doi.org/10.3233/EFI-2004-22201

Simundić A. M. (2013) Bias in research. *Biochemia medica, 23*(1), 12–15. https://doi.org/10.11613/BM.2013.003

Snyder, S. M., Ayres, K. M., Sartini, E. C., Knight, V. F., & Mims, P. J. (2017). Single Case Design Elements in Text Comprehension Research for Students with Developmental Disabilities. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities, 52*(4), 405-421.

Saade, S., Bean, Y. F., Gillespie-Lynch, K., Poirier, N., & Harrison, A. J. (2021). Can participation in an online ASD training enhance attitudes toward inclusion, teaching self-efficacy and ASD knowledge among preservice educators in diverse cultural contexts? *International Journal of Inclusive Education,* 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2021.1931716

Sam, A. M., Odom, S. L., Tomaszewski, B., Perkins, Y., & Cox, A. W. (2020) Employing evidence-based practices for children with autism in elementary schools. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 51*(7), 2308-2323. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-020-04706-x

Sanz-Cervera, P., & Tárraga-Mínguez, R. (2021). Teachers' knowledge regarding autism spectrum disorder (ASD): A Systematic Review. *Sustainability, 13*(9), 5097.

Saxena, R., Agarwal, C., & Ganguly, S. (2021). Application of Bloom's taxonomy model of Teaching and learning in character education for designing effective programs. *Academy of Marketing Studies Journal, 25*(6), 1-12.

Sidhu, J., Barlas, N., & Lifter, K. (2020). *On the meanings of functional play: A review And clarification of definitions.* SAGE Publications.

Slade, N., Eisenhower, A., Carter, A. S., & Blacher, J. (2018). Satisfaction with individualized education programs among parents of young children with ASD. *Exceptional Children, 84*(3), 242-260. https://doi.org/10.1177/0014402917742923

Sparapani, N., Reinhardt, V. P., Hooker, J. L., Morgan, L., Schatschneider, C., & Wetherby, A. M. (2022). Evaluating teacher language within general and special education classrooms serving elementary students with autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 52(*5*),* 2284-2299. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-021-05115-4

Stahmer, A. C., Suhrheinrich, J., Schetter, P. L., & McGhee Hassrick, E. (2018). Exploring multi-level system factors facilitating educator training and implementation of evidence-based practices (EBP): A study protocol. *Implementation Science: IS, 13*(1), 3-3. https://doi.org/10.1186/s13012-017-0698-1

Suhrheinrich, J., Root, B. V., Melgarejo, M., Dickson, K., Vejnoska, S., & Reith, S. R. (2021). Exploring differences and disparities in school-based services received by students with Autism: A systematic review. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders, 85*, 101791. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rasd.2021.101791

Suhrheinrich, J., Melgarejo, M., Root, B., Aarons, G. A., & Brookman-Frazee, L. (2021). Implementation of school-based services for students with autism: Barriers and facilitators across urban and rural districts and phases of implementation. *Autism: The International Journal of Research and Practice, 25*(8), 2291-2304. https://doi.org/10.1177/13623613211016729

Sulek, R., Trembath, D., Paynter, J., & Keen, D. (2021). Factors influencing the selection and use of strategies to support students with autism in the classroom. *International Journal of Disability, Development, and Education, 68*(4), 479-495. https://doi.org/10.1080/1034912X.2019.1695755

Tan, P., & Thorius. K.K. (2019). Towards equity in mathematics education for students with Disabilities: A case study of professional learning. *American Educational Research Journal. 56*(3), 995-1032. https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831218811906

Tekin-Iftar, E., Collins, B. C., Spooner, F., & Olcay-Gul, S. (2017). Coaching teachers to use a simultaneous prompting procedure to teach core content to students with autism. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 40*(3), 225-245. https://doi.org/10.1177/0888406417703751

Teo, J. X., Lau, B.T., & Then, P. (2020). Autism spectrum disorder in Sarawak: An overview and analysis of educator awareness, training, development opportunities, and challenges. *International Journal of Disability, Development, and Education, 69*(2), 623-639. https://doi.org/10.1080/1034912X.2020.1731433

Thompson, A. R., & O'Loughlin, V. D. (2015). The blooming anatomy tool (BAT): A discipline-specific rubric for utilizing Bloom's taxonomy in the design and evaluation of assessments in the anatomical sciences. *Anatomical Sciences Education, 8*(6), 493 501. https://doi.org/10.1002/ase.1507

Van Der Steen, S., Geveke, C. H., Steenbakkers, A. T., & Steenbeek, H. W. (2020). Teaching students with autism spectrum disorders: What are the needs of educational Professionals? *Teaching and Teacher Education, 90*(103036), 103036. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2020.103036

van Manen, M. (1997). *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy (*2nd ed.). Althouse Press.

Vela Llauradó, E., Martín Martínez, L., & Martín Cruz, I. (2020). Analysis of ASD classrooms: Specialized open classrooms in the community of Madrid. *Sustainability (Basel, Switzerland), 12*(18), 7342. https://doi.org/10.3390/su12187342

Vygotsky, L. S. (2021). *L.S. Vygotsky's pedological works: Volume 2, the problem of age*. Springer.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.

Wallis, A. K., Westerveld, M. F., Waters, A. M., & Snow, P. C. (2021). Investigating adolescent discourse in critical thinking: monologic responses to stories containing a moral dilemma. *Language, Speech & Hearing Services in Schools, 52*(2), 630-643. https://doi.org/10.1044/2020_LSHSS-20-00134

Wang, W., & Lin, Y. (2021). The relationships among students' personal innovativeness, compatibility, and learning performance: A social cognitive theory perspective. *Educational Technology & Society, 24*(2), 14-27.

Woltran, F., Lindner, K., Dzojic, T., & Schwab, S. (2022). Will–Skill–Tool Components as Key Factors for Digital Media Implementation in Education: Austrian Teachers' Experiences with Digital Forms of Instruction during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Electronics, 11*(12), 1805. https://doi.org/10.3390/electronics11121805

Wu, Y., Chen, P., Tsai, S., Tsai, S., Chou, Y., & Chiu, C. (2019). The effects of the class-wide function-related intervention teams on behaviors of an elementary student with autism spectrum disorder in an inclusive classroom in Taiwan. *International Journal of Developmental Disabilities, 65*(5), 368-377. https://doi.org/10.1080/20473869.2019.1647031

Yu, S., & Cho, E. (2021). Preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion in early childhood classrooms: A review of the literature. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 50*(4), 687 698. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-021-01187-0

Zakai-Mashiach, M., Dromi, E., & Al-Yagon, M. (2021). Social inclusion of preschool children with ASD: The role of typical peers. *The Journal of Special Education, 55*(1), 13-22. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022466920926132

Zirkel, P. A. (2017). Failure to implement the IEP: The third dimension of FAPE under the IDEA. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies, 28*(3), 174-179. https://doi.org/10.1177/1044207317732582

Appendix A

Institutional Review Board Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

February 29, 2024

Melinda Shadid
Heather Strafaccia

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-1818 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING FOR THE INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER IN PRE-KINDERGARTEN: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Dear Melinda Shadid, Heather Strafaccia,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application per 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 described in your IRB 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).

For a PDF of your exemption letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study Details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page. Your information sheet and final versions of your study documents, **which you must use to conduct your study,** can also be found on the same page under the Attachments tab.

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, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B

Consent Form

Title of the Project: Professional Development and Training for the Inclusion of Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Pre-Kindergarten Urban Classrooms: A Phenomenological Study
Principal Investigator: Melinda Parsons-Shadid, Doctoral Candidate, School of Education, Special Education, Liberty University

Invitation to be part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a special or general education teacher or a paraprofessional in the prekindergarten classroom who supports students with autism. 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 this phenomenological study is to describe the experiences utilizing professional resources to aid in the early childhood education development of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder for teachers at charter schools in a large city in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States.

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:

1. Participate in an in-person or virtual, audio-recorded interview that will take no more than 1 hour.
2. Participate in a virtual focus group with other participants that will take no more than 1 hour and will be audio-recorded.
3. Researchers will observe the participants twice within the classroom. Notes will be taken by the researcher. Each observation will be 30 minutes.

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 will include professional development on how to assist students with autism within the preschool inclusion setting.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

I am a mandatory reporter. During this study, if I receive information about child abuse, child neglect, elder abuse, or intent to harm self or others, I will be required to report it to the appropriate authorities.

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.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with people outside of the group.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted, and/or all hardcopy records will be shredded.
- Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer until participants have reviewed and confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts and then deleted. The researcher and members of her doctoral committee will have access to these recordings.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision on whether 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 Melinda Parsons- Shadid. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [redacted]

You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Melinda Parsons- Shadid at [redacted]

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 IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is 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

Permission Request

November 16, 2023

[redacted]

Dear Ms. Epps,

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Ph.D. in Special Education. The title of my research project is: Professional Development and Training for the Inclusion of Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Pre-Kindergarten Urban Classrooms: A Phenomenological Study. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the experiences utilizing professional resources to aid in the early childhood education development of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder for teachers at charter schools in a large city in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States.

I am writing to request your permission to contact members of your faculty staff to invite them to participate in my research study.

Participants will be asked to schedule an interview, as well as a focus group, and participate in one classroom observation. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.]

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please provide a signed statement on an official letterhead indicating your approval. A permission letter document is attached for your convenience.

Sincerely,

Melinda Parsons-Shadid
Doctoral Candidate

Appendix D

Site Permission

December 10, 2023

[redacted]

Dear Melinda Shadid-Parsons

After a careful review of your research proposal entitled Professional Development and Training for the Inclusion of Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Pre-Kindergarten Urban Classrooms: A Phenomenological Study, we have decided to permit you to contact our faculty and staff to invite them to participate in your study and use the site.

Check the following boxes, as applicable:

☒ I grant permission for Melinda Shadid-Parsons to contact faculty and staff to invite them to participate in her research study.

Sincerely, [redacted]

[redacted]

Appendix E

Recruitment Letter

Dear Potential Participant,

As a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research on the value of professional development for early childhood teachers who teach students with autism spectrum disorder for my Doctor of Philosophy in Special Education. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the experiences of utilizing professional resources to aid in the early childhood education development of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder for teachers at charter schools in a large city in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States.

Participants must be preschool general education teachers, special education teachers, or paraprofessionals who have been teaching within a preschool classroom. Participants will take part in a one-on-one, audio-recorded, in-person or Microsoft Team interview, and take part in a video-recorded focus group. It should take approximately an hour to an hour and a half to complete the procedure listed. Participants will also participate in a 30-minute observation where the researcher will observe within the classroom. Participation will be completely confidential, and no personal, identifying information will be collected.

To participate, please contact me at [redacted] to schedule an interview. If you meet my participant criteria, I will work with you to schedule a time for an interview.

A consent document is attached to this email. 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/focus group/etc.

Sincerely,

Melinda Parsons-Shadid
Doctoral Candidate
[redacted]

Appendix F

Recruitment Follow Up

Dear Potential Participant,

As a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research on the value of professional development for early childhood teachers who teach students with autism spectrum disorder for my Doctor of Philosophy in Special Education. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the experiences utilizing professional resources to aid in the early childhood education development of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder for teachers at charter schools in a large city in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Contact me at [redacted] if you haven't already done so. The deadline for participation is January 1, 2024.

Participants must be preschool general education teachers, special education teachers, or paraprofessionals that have been teaching within a preschool classroom. Participants will take part in a one-on-one, audio-recorded, in-person or Microsoft Teams interview, and take part in a video-recorded focus group. It should take approximately an hour to complete the procedure listed. Participants will also participate in a 30-minute observation where the researcher will observe within the classroom. Participation will be completely confidential and no personal identifying information will be collected.

To participate, please contact me at [redacted] to schedule an interview. If you meet my participant criteria, I will work with you to schedule a time for an interview.

A consent document is attached to this email. 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/focus group/etc.

Sincerely,

Melinda Parsons-Shadid
Doctoral Candidate
[redacted]

Appendix G

Individual Interview Questions

Individual Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your teaching career to your current position. CRQ
2. What professional skills have you prepared yourself with to assist students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD)? SQ1
3. How do you create individualized learning to achieve core learning outcomes? SQ1
4. Describe your feelings when creating revised lesson plans for students with ASD. SQ1
5. What type of professional development programs do you feel should be implemented to support early childhood professionals in educating students with ASD? SQ2
6. How do you create a learning environment conducive to all types of learners? SQ2
7. What are the norms surrounding teachers continuing education programming to support students diagnosed with ASD? SQ2
8. What supportive resources would you recommend for your school to help create knowledge in educating students with ASD? SQ3
9. What are your expectations for your school in providing supportive resources to aid in teaching students with ASD? SQ3
10. What are the general education teacher's responsibilities in developing knowledge for teaching students with ASD? SQ3
11. What else would you like to add to our conversation today that we have not already discussed? CRQ

Appendix H

Focus Group Questions

Focus Group Questions

1. What is the most rewarding classroom aspect of teaching students with ASD? SQ1
2. What is the most challenging classroom aspect of teaching students with ASD? SQ1
3. How does a teaching team guide teaching methods for educating students with ASD? SQ2
4. What was the most influential professional development program you have attended? SQ2
5. Describe the most valuable ASD learning concept that has changed how you teach students with ASD? SQ3
6. What expectations do you hold when a student with ASD is assigned to your classroom? SQ3
7. If you could make one recommendation to your school to support educating students with ASD, what would you say? CRQ

Appendix I

Observation Form

Observation Form

Name:

Date:

Name of participant:

Time (Time Stamps will be given during the duration of the observation):

Activity (Evidence of accommodations and modifications):

Summary of Events:

Reflective Notes from Participant:
