INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM SETTING FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WITH

EMOTIONAL BEHAVIOR DISORDERS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL

STUDY OF EDUCATORS' EXPERIENCES

by

Marvin Marshall

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of public high school teachers educating students with emotional behavior disorders (EBDs) in the inclusive classroom setting in the Major County School District. The theory guiding this study was Ryan and Deci's self-determination theory (SDT). SDT was applied to this study to understand the autonomy, competence, and relatedness experiences of teachers. Hermeneutics, meaning interpretive or explanatory, was the application of phenomenological design that was used for this study. This approach focused on the commonality of lived experiences that lay beneath surface awareness which is an interpretive process in an individual's world. Criterion sampling with maximum variation in mind was done to select 14 participants who have experienced the study's central phenomenon. Data was collected through individual interviews, focus group interviews, and behavior documents collected. The data was analyzed using the Saldaña method of first and second order coding. Three themes were revealed during the data analysis process: teachers are committed to supporting students, preparing teachers for the inclusive classroom setting, and support system for teachers. A major finding of this study was that professional development programs for teachers are vital in the development of them adequately educating students with EBDs in the inclusive classroom setting.

Keywords: inclusive, differentiate, accommodate, self-contained, behaviors

Copyright Page

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife and children. May you continue to grow in knowledge and wisdom throughout your lives.

Acknowledgments

I must acknowledge the advice and encouraging words from my Chair. Her encouraging words convinced me to persevere and complete the process. I am very grateful for Dr. Kristy Motte. There could not have been a better Chair chosen for me.

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List of Abbreviations

Behavioral Intervention Plan (BIP)

Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA)

Emotional Behavior Disorder (EBD)

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Individualized Education Plan (IEP)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Least Restricted Environment (LRE)

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA)

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Students with Disability (SWD)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Teachers have experienced unique challenges educating students with emotional behavior disorders (EBD) in the inclusive classroom setting (Mahabbati et al., 2022; McGuire & Meadan, 2022; Van Mieghem et al., 2022). This chapter provides the background of teachers' experiences in the inclusive classroom setting educating students with EBDs. The historical and social contexts provide the foundation of information related to teacher experiences and the theoretical context provides information from previous research and theories as they relate to this topic. The problem statement provides insight into the issue of teachers not being properly trained to educate students with EBDs in the inclusive classroom setting. The significance of the study describes how this research may theoretically and empirically contribute to existing research on the topic of teachers' experiences and proper training. The research questions correlate to the foundation of the study and the pertinent definitions are included. There is a gap in the literature pertaining to adequate training and development for general education teachers educating students with behavioral disabilities in the inclusive classroom setting.

Background

A provision of the special education law mandates that students with special needs be educated in the general education setting (Mooney & Ryan, 2022) with their non-disabled peers (Melloy & Murry, 2019) in the least restricted environment (LRE) to the maximum extent appropriate (McKenna et al., 2019). The term emotional behavior disorder (EBD) was previously referred to as serious emotional disturbance(s) (Pereira & Lavoie, 2018), which originated from emotional disturbance(s) (ED) and was revised to lessen the language intensity of the designation (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). Students who are identified as having emotional

behavior disorders (EBDs) display behaviors that go beyond the conventional challenging behavior for a typically developing student (McGuire & Meadan, 2022). Teachers have varied perceptions about how students with EBDs progress in an inclusive classroom learning environment (Ndivhuwo et al., 2022). Some support such inclusion (Pereira & Lavoie, 2018), while others are opposed (Rodríguez et al., 2021). Research shows a lack of teacher support for inclusion (Dalgaard et al., 2022), as this may affect the progression of the student with special needs academically and behaviorally (McKenna et al., 2019). While this study's goal is to understand the importance of teachers being properly and adequately trained to educate students with EBDs in the inclusive classroom setting. It is first important to understand the historical, social, and theoretical context of this topic.

Historical Context

In the 1940s, federal and state government agencies moved individuals with disabilities into public schools and mainstream society (Oelrich, 2012). In 1974, it was documented that nearly half of the six million students who did attend school received no special education services from the public school system (Bettencourt et al., 2018; Oelrich, 2012). In 1975, the United States Congress enacted the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) in response to the discrimination of special education students in public schools, which was renamed and amended to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (Bettencourt et al., 2018). IDEA is a set of legalized rights that allows students with special needs to receive free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the LRE (Bacon & Pomponio, 2023). Before IDEA, students continued to face discrimination as the number of students with special needs who were excluded from public education was massive (Garland & Dieker, 2019).

IDEA mandates that school districts create an individualized education plan (IEP) for

students identified as having a disability (Zoromski et al., 2021). The IEP was introduced in 1975 and was designed to meet the needs of every child with a disability with parental approval (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). The IEP identifies the academic, behavioral, and functional goals for students to reach on an annual basis (Sanderson & Goldman, 2023). The IEP is a roadmap to how the school will provide students with disabilities (SWD) a FAPE (Weiss et al., 2021). Throughout the years, students who felt they were not receiving FAPE challenged their school systems in court on multiple occasions (Van Mieghem et al., 2022). In 2000, two SWDs who were deaf from birth (Easterbrooks et al., 2004) and were denied FAPE (Lanterman et al., 2021). They were placed in a classroom with students that had severe and multiple disabilities (McConnell et al., 2021). The teacher had no knowledge of how to educate deaf students nor did the teacher understand sign language (Silvestri & Hartman, 2022). Because the two students were denied FAPE, they were awarded 2.5 million dollars by the courts in Alabama (Easterbrooks et al., 2004).

Recently, there has been a shift with teachers in inclusive classrooms providing various learning tools to students with EBDs and those with other disabilities (Verret et al., 2022) so the students develop the learning skills needed to live independently in society (Crispel & Kasperski, 2021). Teachers are required to search for effective instructional strategies and methods of accommodating students with EBDs (Lanterman et al., 2021), to keep them engaged in classroom activities because of the increase of SWD in inclusive environments (Ennis & Katsiyannis, 2018). The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) (2001) increased the population of SWD and EBD in general education classrooms (Bacon & Pomponio, 2023). The NCLBA profoundly affects the education of students with EBDs, who consistently perform below grade level as their general education peers (Karagianni & Drigas, 2023). Based on a review covering

25 years of the academic status of students with EBDs, the review found that 91% of these students did not perform above grade or age level and were labeled academically deficient (Vannest et al., 2009). The NCLBA increases the focus on academic accountability, as it mandates that the academic achievement of students with EBDs should be measured in the same manner as their peers (Karagianni & Drigas, 2023; Vannest et al., 2009).

SWDs have the guarantee of FAPE through the legislation of IDEA (Hurwitz et al., 2021). In 2023, it is hard to believe that any student would be denied FAPE in school systems because of the laws for general and special education students that are in place (Koehler & Wild, 2019; Mathews et al., 2023). As a result, it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish general education students from SWD (Curran et al., 2021). However, school systems continue to struggle to practice inclusive education for students with EBDs consistently (Mahabbati et al., 2022). The inclusive education practice continues to struggle (Mason et al., 2021), because of the fear some teachers have of students with EBDs in the classroom among other general education students (Mutter et al., 2023).

Social Context

Students who are identified as having an EBD display behavior that go beyond the conventional challenging behavior for a typically developing student (McGuire & Meadan, 2022) which can directly impact their social contexts. For students with EBDs, learning in the inclusive classroom setting alongside their peers can lead to a variety of struggles (Van Mieghem et al., 2022). There are internalizing and externalizing behaviors exhibited in students with EBDs (Ahmed et al., 2022). Internalizing behaviors exhibited in these students are depression, social withdrawal, anxiety, or psychosomatic reactions (Inbar-Furst & Landau, 2022). Externalizing behaviors consist of attention problems, aggression, disruptive behavior, immaturity, or self-

injurious behavior (Tamsah et al., 2023). These internalizing and externalizing behaviors can directly impact their social contexts in the classroom and community (Inbar-Furst & Landau, 2022; McGuire & Meadan, 2022).

One of the social struggles students with EBDs experience is difficulty building relationships with their peers (Rukavina et al., 2019). In order to increase their engagement and the building of quality relationships between special and general education students in the classroom and community (Chambers et al., 2020), teachers can be taught how to develop soft and hard skills in their classroom settings (McConnell et al., 2021). In some school systems, educational leaders require teachers to utilize soft skills for SWD in the classroom setting to increase the students' everyday skills (Bartlett & Freeze, 2019). The concept of soft refers to skills that are social and personal (Fernandes et al., 2021) and the opposite of hard (Tamsah et al., 2023). Hard skills are skills that relate to technical skills that relate to tools or programs (Kwon et al., 2023). In the past, these skills were considered in other categories of the profession (Sengupta et al., 2023). Students with EBDs need to form healthy peer relationships in the classroom to increase the likelihood of engaging with others in social environments in the future (Archbell & Coplan, 2022; McGuire & Meadan, 2022).

Students with EBDs can also struggle socially to form strong relationships with their teachers (Alkahtani, 2022). In terms of social closeness between students with EBDs and their teachers, these students have low levels of closeness and high levels of dependency on their teachers (Evashkovsky & Osipova, 2023). There is often little positive social interaction between teachers and students with EBDs (Soares et al., 2022), which makes it difficult for these students to socialize with teachers and other students in the classroom or within the school community (Ndivhuwo et al., 2022). Engaging the students in classroom activities that require all student

involvement for rewards works well for social interaction with others and reduces deficiency behaviors in students with EBDs (Francisco et al., 2020). Positive student-teacher relationships can be important for students with EBDs in reducing their feelings of anxiety and depression, as well as teachers effectively managing their classrooms of students with diverse disabilities and disorders in the inclusive learning environment (Keane et al., 2023; Knopik et al., 2022).

Theoretical Context

A variety of theories have been used to understand the instruction of students with EBDs. Two foundational theories are the medical model and social model of disabilities. The medical model of disability focuses on an individual's mental or physical limitations and is not connected to the social environment (Chou et al., 2023). The medical model of disability is applied when focusing on the deficiency behaviors that must be treated within the student (Chambers et al., 2020). This model of disability helps aid practices for SWD in helping them become independent, develop communication skills, learn to make new friends, reach teachers' behavioral expectations, and complete tasks in the same manner as their general education peers (Chou et al., 2023; Park et al., 2021). This model is a contrast with the social model of disability. The social model of disability is known as a social construct, as individuals who are disabled show deficiencies from an ableist, inaccessible environment not by a problem within themselves (Zagona et al., 2022). This model of disability focuses on the person who is disabled in an environment among other people and how these things become a hindrance to the person who is disabled (Graham et al., 2021). Exclusion from individuals without disabilities and how this may protect individuals who are disabled can be a way of accommodating the person who is disabled in the social model (Ndivhuwo et al., 2022).

Many theories can be used to understand the experience of teachers in the inclusive

classroom setting educating students with EBDs (Bacon & Pomponio, 2023). For example, Deci and Ryan's (1980) self-determination theory (SDT) states that the expectation of incentives or rewards in the future is derived by inherent motivation (Nukhu & Singh, 2023). It has been used to understand the core elements that influence behavior: autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2000). For students with EBDs specifically, researchers have used SDT to understand the self-regulation development of students (Xia et al., 2023), problem-solving (Sheldon & Prentice, 2019), and choice-making skills (Ward et al., 2010). These are highly relevant to satisfying basic psychological needs (i.e., autonomy, competence, relatedness) (Umemoto & Inagaki, 2023).

Problem Statement

The problem is that students with EBDs in inclusive settings are not being properly accommodated academically (Mahabbati et al., 2022) or behaviorally (Bettini et al., 2019) by teachers who are adequately trained to support their needs (Evashkovsky & Osipova, 2023), which can cause irreparable harm for these students now and in the future (McKenna et al., 2022). In 2018, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, only 69% of SWDs graduated with a regular diploma, while 18% dropped out (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). Other groups with disabilities, such as students with EBDs accounted for 35% of those dropping out of school (Silvestri & Hartman, 2022). According to the U.S. Department of Education, an average of 40% of students with EBDs graduate from high school compared to 76% of general education students completing the same requirements (Kielblock & Woodcock, 2023; Vaughan, 2020). This disparity is alarming and comes at a great cost to both society and the individual. The average high school dropout costs the economy approximately $260,000 (American Psychiatric Association, 2022) over the student's lifetime in terms of higher reliance

on Medicaid and Medicare, higher reliance on welfare, higher rates of criminal activity, and lower tax contributions (McFarland et al., 2016). Although inclusive settings result in these high rates of attrition for students with EBDs, inclusion is mandated by IDEA (Brazzolotto & Phelps, 2021). There are many barriers to true inclusion for students with EBDs including negative stereotypes and stigmas (Garwood & Van Loan, 2019), difficulty integrating with peers (Ferreira et al., 2023; Zweers et al., 2019) and connecting with their teachers (Cornell & Sayman, 2020; Ndivhuwo et al., 2022). Peer interactions and student–teacher interactions may play a role in placement choices for these students, with the student potentially being placed in a general or special education learning environment (Zweers et al., 2019). Irrespective of regular or special educational context, studies that examined student–teacher relationships have consistently found that typically developing students have far better student–teacher relationships than students with EBDs (Knopik et al., 2022). Research shows meeting the needs of all learners requires movement away from one-size-fits-all instruction towards differentiated instruction in the classroom setting (Brazzolotto & Phelps, 2021). However, there is limited research on teacher experiences with classroom-based practices for students with EBDs in the inclusive classroom setting (Burgueño et al., 2022).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of public high school teachers educating students with EBDs in inclusive classroom settings. At this stage in the research, inclusion was generally defined as placing students with EBDs in a classroom setting with their general education peers (Van Mieghem et al., 2022). Students with EBDs was defined as students who exhibit behaviors that go beyond the conventional challenging behavior for a typically developing student (McGuire & Meadan, 2022).

Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand teachers' experiences in inclusive classroom settings instructing students with EBDs. Considering the different characteristics of students with special needs, one of the factors of inclusive education was to change the negative views teachers have, which is imperative for creating a comfortable learning environment in the inclusive classroom setting (Bogush et al., 2022). In challenging a teacher's existing pedagogical design, one's teaching practice requires deliberate engagement in learning and discussion that encourages self-reflexivity (Brazzolotto & Phelps, 2021). A teacher's engagement with their student that impacts their self-reflexivity was important to the theoretical, empirical, and practical view of this study. This study aimed to be significant theoretically, empirically, and practically (Ferreira et al., 2023).

Theoretical

The self-determination theory was applied to this study to understand the autonomy, competence, and relatedness experiences of teachers instructing students with EBDs in inclusive settings (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Quality teachers being properly developed through teacher training and professional development programs can improve teacher competencies and minimize teacher abandonment which has been occurring at a high rate over the years (Burgueño et al., 2022). In understanding that motivation determines the maintenance and initiation of a person's behavior, studying the motivational processes in teachers educating students with EBDs in inclusive classroom settings can be of great interest (Harbour et al., 2022). Students who develop a positive connection with their teachers are more likely to develop integrated and identifiable regulations for learning lessons than those who feel a sense of disconnection from their teachers (Xia et al., 2023). Teachers with a greater sense of relatedness with their

environment in school perform better in the classroom and tend to remain longer in the profession than others who do not feel a sense of connectedness or relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985). This study will be theoretically significant as it applies self-determination theory to a specific setting, namely teachers of students with EBDs. It may confirm, disprove, or even extend Deci and Ryan's (1985) theory as it relates to this population.

Empirical

There is a growing discourse in education on inclusive practices when it comes to the often-overlooked perspective of teachers in literature (Ferreira et al., 2023). In search of a supportive environment for students with or without special needs, new challenges for teachers have been brought in inclusive education (van den Berg & Stoltz, 2018). In this study, conducting a comprehensive analysis of teachers' experiences and attitudes toward inclusive education is an important topic because teaching behavior is triggered by attitudes (Cornell & Sayman, 2020). While the attitudes of teachers towards inclusion is a commonly researched topic (Kielblock & Woodcock, 2023), this study aimed to be empirically significant by adding to the existing literature on attitudes with the perceptions and experiences of teachers regarding students with EBDs in inclusive settings specifically.

Practical

This study may be practically significant for teachers who have general education students and students with EBDs in their inclusive classroom setting. Research shows teachers struggle with classroom management and the appropriate placement and integration of students with EBDs in the classroom (van den Berg & Stoltz, 2018). Teachers can increase their understanding of their relationships with their students and colleagues in the classroom (Brazzolotto & Phelps, 2021). Expanding teachers' pedagogical skills, content knowledge, and

professional dispositions is vital in accommodating students with EBDs academically and behaviorally in the inclusive classroom setting (Ferreira et al., 2023). After this study, teachers may be able to apply behavioral strategies to their classroom rules and regulations that better accommodate general education students and students with EBDs. Teachers will be able to glean important information from this study concerning the seating arrangement for students with more externalizing behaviors in the inclusive classroom.

Research Questions

This hermeneutic phenomenology study sought to understand the experiences of teachers educating students with EBDs in the inclusive classroom setting. Recent studies have called for advanced interventions and intensive support for students with EBDs with complex needs in inclusive settings (Cornell & Sayman, 2020). There has been a lack of professional development for general education teachers, in preparing them to educate students with EBDs in the inclusive classroom setting (Crispel & Kasperski, 2021). The relationships between the teachers, parents, and/or community agencies are critical for overcoming these challenges teachers experience on a consistent basis in the field of special education (Zweers et al., 2019). The theoretical framework for this study, built around Deci and Ryan's SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985) has served to develop all aspects of this study including the research questions (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This study was guided by one central research question and three sub-questions:

Central Research Question

What are the shared experiences of public high school teachers instructing students with emotional behavior disorders (EBDs) in inclusive classroom settings?

The need for this research is to better understand the experiences of teachers educating students with EBDs in an inclusive setting. The collective experiences of the teachers will

become the catalyst to pursue further learning in order to bring needed change that supports inclusive education for students with EBDs and other students with disabilities. This question is further explored through three sub-questions.

Sub-Question One

What challenges do high school teachers experience while instructing students with emotional behavior disorders (EBDs) in inclusive classroom settings?

SDT provided the theoretical foundation for this question. It was used to understand the challenges teachers face instructing students with EBDs in inclusive settings. SDT proposes that teachers may experience extrinsic motivation, which could involve external rewards or avoid punishment from educational leaders (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000). As teachers experience the challenges of educating students with EBDs, the motivation to understand how to meet the needs of the students encourages the teachers to be well prepared to meet the challenges they may face in the inclusive setting.

Sub-Question Two

What are the relatedness experiences of public high school teachers instructing students with emotional behavior disorders (EBDs) in inclusive classroom settings?

Deci and Ryan's SDT theory also provided a theoretical framework for this question. As teachers understand current practices concerning inclusive education for students with EBDs, there exist opportunities to learn from other educators teaching in the inclusive learning environment. The relationships between teachers and others in the inclusive classroom and outside the inclusive classroom environment is important for the success of teachers instructing students with EBDs. This question was used to understand the relationship teachers have with their student who has an EBD, their other students, other teachers, and their administration.

Sub-Question Three

What are the competence experiences of public high school teachers instructing students with emotional behavior disorders (EBDs) in inclusive classroom settings?

Again, SDT provided the theoretical framework for this question. Deci and Ryan spoke of the intrinsic motivation that drives learning for the teacher (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000). SDT provides the structure of teachers internally motivated to teach students with EBDs. This question provided insight into the teachers' competence level of educating students with EBDs in the inclusive classroom setting. It revealed a lack of competence or how teachers remediated their competence when it was lacking.

Definitions

1. *Accommodations* – An alteration in the general education curriculum that provides support to students with disabilities for them to succeed in receiving general education content as their general education peers (Bettencourt et al., 2018).

2. *Andragogy* – Viewed as a system of concepts and the art and science of adult learning where students are encouraged to participate in the learning environment by utilizing their own experience (Note et al., 2021).

3. *Differentiation* – Altering instructional content to meet each student's individual needs (Graham et al., 2021).

4. *Emotional Behavior Disorder (EBD)* – A disability or disorder characterized by deficits in behavior different from appropriate age, ethnic norms, or culture that adversely affect educational performance (American Psychiatric Association, 2022).

5. *Inclusive Classroom* – A classroom where students with disabilities and students without disabilities learn educational content in the same learning environment (Francis et al., 2021).

6. *Individualized Education Plan (IEP)* – A written plan developed by a team of individuals for a student with a disability that clearly defines the student's present levels of functional and academic performance. The team of individuals consists of the parent, a special education liaison, a general and special education teacher, and any other individual that works to support the special education student (Mahabbati et al., 2022).

7. *Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)* – A learning environment that enables students with disabilities to be educated alongside their peers to the maximum extent appropriate (Kurth et al., 2019).

8. *Mainstream Classroom* – A classroom setting where the majority of students do not exhibit a disability or disorder (Alkahtani, 2022).

9. *Pedagogy* – The art and science of teaching methods to lead students (Friesen & Su, 2023).

10. *Self-contained Setting* – A classroom setting that contains only special education students in the learning environment (Jackson et al., 2017).

<div align="center">**Summary**</div>

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of public high school teachers have educating students with EBDs in the inclusive classroom setting. Despite the advancements in modern educational technologies, the teacher remains the most important requirement of the educational process for general and special education students (Ahmad Al Remawi, 2022; Brazzolotto & Phelps, 2021). Today, because of the manifold roles of teachers,

some educational institutions are requiring in-service training for their much-needed development (Ahmad Al Remawi, 2022; Garland & Dieker, 2019). Moreover, the teacher's ability to perform these roles in the classroom is of great importance to the student and educational institution (Chen et al., 2023), in order for the student to show progression academically, behaviorally, and socially (Inbar-Furst & Landau, 2022; Rivera & McKeithan, 2021; Rukavina et al., 2019). There is a gap in the literature pertaining to effective training and development for teachers in the inclusive classroom environment educating students with EBDs (Evashkovsky & Osipova, 2023; Van Mieghem et al., 2022; Zoromski et al., 2021). Due to the importance of the role they play in educating students with EBD, one of the most important issues that occupy pedagogical and educational institutions is the preparation of special education teachers (Bruhn et al., 2023; Crispel & Kasperski, 2021; Friesen & Su, 2023), as it will elevate their professional competence and provide them with the necessary skills to advance in their field of work (Ahmad Al Remawi, 2022; Lanterman et al., 2021).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of public high school teachers educating students with EBDs in inclusive classroom settings, considering the abilities and individual characteristics of each student. This chapter begins with a review of the study's theoretical framework. Then, it continues with an overview of related literature, beginning with EBDs, inclusive classrooms, teacher perceptions of EBDs, and teacher preparation programs. It closes with a summary.

Theoretical Framework

This study aimed to understand the experiences of public high school teachers who teach students with EBDs in the inclusive classroom setting, self-determination theory (SDT) serves as the theoretical framework for this study. SDT was originated by Richard Ryan and Edward Deci and has been researched for the past 40 years, (Cho et al., 2023). SDT is a major theory that represents an expansive framework for the study of human motivation and personality (Nukhu & Singh, 2023). The propositions of SDT have been used to understand the dynamics in classrooms, families, organizations, teams, cultures, and clinics (Ward et al., 2010). At the core of this theory is intrinsic motivation, which is defined as the motivation to engage in an activity because of the inherent satisfaction rather than the desire for a reward (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Intrinsic motivation can be increased or decreased by a change in the self-perception of a person (Ryan & Deci, 2000). From Freud onward, there is a long history of dynamic perspectives upon recognizable personalities (Sheldon & Prentice, 2019).

Deci and Ryan developed SDT, because they were interested in the factors that facilitate or undermine high-quality motivation in people being wholeheartedly engaged in something

giving their best experience and performance (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Deci and Ryan proposed that people were willing to do things they wanted to do, from an autonomous standpoint (Ward et al., 2010). Their theory of motivation toppled the belief that the best way to get people to perform tasks is to reward them (Umemoto & Inagaki, 2023). SDT is an approach to human motivation and personality that uses inner resources for personality development, identifying three needs that are essential for facilitating optimal functioning for growth and constructive social development which are autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Sheldon & Prentice, 2019).

Autonomy

Autonomy is a basic psychological need defined as the opportunity to be in control of one's own behavior and the volition to self-regulate an individual's experiences (Ryan & Deci, 2000), in which all individuals are motivated to attain and feel competent in performing certain tasks (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Greater intrinsic motivation and a desire for challenges are empowered in students by teachers who are autonomy-supportive (Ward et al., 2010). In contrast, students learn less effectively when they are taught with a more controlling approach (Nukhu & Singh, 2023). Autonomous motivation leads to more in-depth learning for teachers to feel a sense of self-endorsement and volition in their actions educating students in their classroom (Cho et al., 2023).

Competence

Competence is another psychological need defined as having feelings of effectiveness to produce desired outcomes and experience mastery within an environment, physically or socially (Ward et al., 2010). Perceived competence in teachers differs by teacher profile (length of time in the profession), class size, and individuals in the classroom with various exceptionalities (Sheldon & Prentice, 2019). Teachers with more experience in the classroom possess higher

levels of competence; however, having larger classrooms showed a drop in intrinsic motivation and perceived competence (Sanchez-De Miguel et al., 2023).

Relatedness

Relatedness is defined as being connected with others as well as individuals having feelings of being part of a community, caring for, and being cared for (Ward et al., 2010). Teachers' positive emotions, appreciation, and involvement with students develops relatedness within the classroom environment. When relatedness occurs from teacher to pupil, a potential rise in growth, openness, sincere involvement, vitality, and positive feelings can perpetuate a positive cycle (Webster & De Boer, 2021). When relatedness is not accomplished in the classroom with their colleagues, teachers feel isolated and often leave the teaching profession (Mason et al., 2021; Soares et al., 2022).

SDT characterizes a general framework of personality and forecasts multiple types of human motivation (Cho et al., 2023). As it relates to learning, motivation is an important factor for all individuals (Umemoto & Inagaki, 2023). In this study, SDT propositions will be used to understand how these factors facilitate teachers' perceptions of teaching students with EBDs in the inclusive classroom setting. Given that motivation determines the initiation of an individual's behavior, studying the motivation processes of teachers in general and special education classroom settings would seem essential to analyze (Burgueño et al., 2022).

Related Literature

The practice of educating all students in general education classrooms, with accommodations and modifications available to support SWD to the maximum extent appropriate is the definition of inclusive education (Harrison et al., 2019). It is imperative to examine teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and motivation toward students with EBDs in the general

education environment (Lanterman et al., 2021). Teachers held the strongest positive attitudes toward students with sensory and physical disabilities; however, the same teachers held the strongest negative feelings toward the inclusion of students that exhibited behavior problems in the classroom (Alkahtani, 2022). A major cause of teachers' negative attitude toward inclusion is the anxiety and stress that are caused by students with EBDs in their classroom environment (Lawrence et al., 2010). These negative feelings can cause burnout, professional dissatisfaction, and can lead to teachers leaving the teaching profession (Inbar-Furst & Landau, 2022).

While teachers are willing to adapt their practices to support students with EBDs, they often struggle to determine which strategies are effective (Verret et al., 2022) and desire greater training and support (Virani & Ali, 2022). Successful training for general and special education teachers enables self-efficacy and powerfully shapes teachers' skills in enhancing their ability to provide effective instruction to students, which allows them to achieve individual specialized goals (Mathews et al., 2023). General and special education teachers' engagement with professional learning development is a widely used practice that has been shown to increase teacher efficacy and impact student achievement in a positive way (Kielblock & Woodcock, 2023). However, addressing the specific demands, needs, and motivations of teachers is part of the complexity of professional development implementation and planning (Harbour et al., 2022). Today, addressing the topic of having qualified general and special education teachers effectively educating a rapidly growing special needs population in inclusive classroom environments, is of extreme importance for the betterment of the students' progress socially and functionally in our society (Verret et al., 2022). The following review of related literature dives more thoroughly into emotional behavior disorders, the least restrictive environment, inclusive classroom settings, general and social inclusion, inclusive strategies, differentiating instruction in

inclusive settings, addressing barriers in inclusive settings, SWD and relationships, self-contained settings, placement of SWD, co-teaching in inclusive settings, professional development, and the summary.

Emotional Behavior Disorders

An emotional behavior disorder is a disability or disorder characterized by deficits in behavior different from appropriate age, ethnic norms, or cultural that adversely affect educational performance (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). Students are labeled with an EBD and qualify for special education services in the public school system when their behavior has an adverse effect on their academic performance in the classroom environment (Garwood & Ampuja, 2019). EBDs cause a range of conditions, including conduct disorders, oppositional defiant disorder, anxiety disorders, and disruptive mood dysregulation disorder which is included for children up to the age of 18 who exhibit frequent episodes of behavioral issues (Scott et al., 2023). The results of which, are an emotional liability for the individual (Yue et al., 2022). Each disorder manifests differently in each student (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). In addition, students with EBDs commonly exhibit difficulties in managing their emotions, poor communication skills, depression, impulsivity, and showing aggressive actions toward peers and adults (Riden et al., 2022).

There are challenging connectedness experiences related to academic, social, and behavioral problems for students who have an EBD (Mahabbati et al., 2022). These challenges can lead to, a sense of isolation and frustration, academic underachievement, minimal task engagement, and strained relationships with their peers and teachers (Conroy et al., 2023). In the classroom environment, these problems can be particularly concerning because they can cause disruptions to the ongoing activities in class and can hinder others from learning (Francisco et

al., 2020), which is more detrimental when other students are affected (Carr et al., 2022). When these issues are prevalent, services are no longer provided in an inclusive classroom setting with other general education students (Zweers et al., 2020). This can result in exclusion from school with a higher risk of being placed in the juvenile justice system (Oliveira et al., 2023).

Students with EBDs should be granted the same legal and educational rights as other SWD (Hurwitz et al., 2021). Every student deserves an education that nurtures their unique strengths, enhances their growth, and equips them with the necessary skills to succeed in life (Mahabbati et al., 2022). Despite effective interventions for students with EBDs in school, they continue to have extreme academic failure, high criminal activity, and the poorest post-school economic outcomes (Mahabbati et al., 2022; Owens & Lo, 2022). Function-related intervention teams implementing classroom management programs based on positive behavior support have found to be effective strategies in special education classrooms (Wills et al., 2023). However, once students with EBDs are placed in the juvenile justice system their chances of graduating from high school decrease (Ferolino & Yap, 2023). This can have a long-term effect on students with EBDs because juvenile justice systems are becoming increasingly more like criminal justice systems around the world (Oliveira et al., 2023).

According to the world report on disability from the World Health Organization, ninety-three million children up to the age of fourteen are estimated to have a moderate or severe disability in both developing and already developed countries (Tiwari, 2023). The World Health Organization has developed programs for families of children with disabilities to address the gap for children in low-income international countries (Sengupta et al., 2023). These outcomes have become a worldwide challenge due to a lack of successful inclusive practices in education (Zabeli et al., 2021). Beginning from preschool and continuing through higher education, the

implementation of inclusion principles and the education of students with EBDs remains a persistent challenge around the globe (Supriadi et al., 2023). The disassembling of segregated education is the primary concern of inclusive education in some countries, as evidenced in many cross-cultural studies assisted by international bodies to ensure that all students have access to general education content (McConnell et al., 2021). The inclusion of SWD is legislated internationally and the acceptance of inclusive education is continuously growing around the world (Francisco et al., 2020).

According to the NCLBA (2001), there are laws that mandate inclusive education for every child in the educational school system that requires all students to be involved in all mainstream activities internationally and in the United States (Karagianni & Drigas, 2023). The No Child Left Behind Act (2001) proposes that all students have access to the general education curriculum with the content taught by highly qualified teachers (Koehler & Wild, 2019). Since the inception of inclusive education in the United States, the educational framework of SWD has been defined by legal determinations of court cases, the civil rights movement, and the passing of state and federal laws (Fernandes et al., 2021). For this reason, the efficacy and appropriateness of inclusive education continues to be complex and multifaceted, especially when the topic of inclusion includes students with EBDs in the LRE (Harrison et al., 2019).

Students with EBDs experience high rates of behavioral and academic failure in various classroom settings (Garland & Dieker, 2019). Students with EBDs are among the most marginalized group of students in schools and various data sources indicate that they are disproportionally impacted by illicit practices that deny them their civil rights to a FAPE (Melloy & Murry, 2019). They often develop negative self-concepts academically and experience frustration when it comes to learning new material and concepts relating to a subject matter

(Garwood & Ampuja, 2019). Many school districts are quick to label students with EBD and segregate them from other students placing them in separate classrooms and institutions (Yoon, 2019). This relates to poor outcomes for students with EBDs in the future (Owens & Lo, 2022).

In order to access the curriculum effectively students with EBDs may require accommodations, modifications, and additional supports (Bacon & Pomponio, 2023). This may involve academic scaffolding, assistive technology, individualized behavior intervention plans, differentiated instruction, and sensory regulation strategies (Chen et al., 2023). By creating a predictable and structured classroom environment (van den Berg & Stoltz, 2018), teachers can provide a sense of stability and help minimize triggers for these students to assist them in having behaviors conducive to the classroom environment (Hurwitz et al., 2021). School officials or the IEP team must know the school climate and connectedness in relation to variations of EBDs (Mahabbati et al., 2022). Furthermore, it is significant to understand the impact students with EBDs have on inclusive and self-contained learning environments and to provide the necessary interventions when needed (Curran et al., 2021).

To improve student outcomes, knowledgeable and skilled teachers must give students with EBDs evidence-based behavioral and academic supports (State et al., 2019). Effective evidence-based practices make a difference on meeting the needs of challenged students, with solid preparations from the teacher (Rivera & McKeithan, 2021). With the use of effective-based practices, teachers must be prepared to balance the impact of academic and behavioral challenges (Melloy & Murry, 2019). In order to master content objectives and develop the emotional, social, and behavioral skills needed to collaboratively work together, problem solve, and accept constructive feedback to appropriately resolve conflicts in school and life, these foundational skills are needed (Van Mieghem et al., 2022). Students with EBDs are in critical need of support

from teachers because EBD students face challenges throughout their lives (Filderman et al.,

2022). More than other students with exceptionalities, students with EBDs struggle with poor

academic performance as well as behavioral challenges, and without effective taught skills their

performance doesn't improve over time (Lawrence et al., 2010). Thus, the need for efficient

instruction is imperative from effective teachers who have the knowledge and skills to

implement the necessary strategies (State et al., 2019).

Once students with EBDs are placed in general education settings it is vital for teachers

to utilize techniques and strategies to include these students in classroom activities and functions,

not just merely having them placed in the classroom environment as a statistic (Lanterman et al.,

2021). It calls into question the degree to which students with EBDs are appropriately being

served through inclusion with their peers (Karimah & Hasegawa, 2022). Today, it is still not

clear if an inclusive setting is appropriate for students with EBDs to meet their individualized

goals and objectives (Jackson et al., 2017), because of this many concerns remain (McKenna et

al., 2022). Teachers in inclusive classrooms have an obligation to know and understand each

EBD student's behavioral intervention plan to improve patterns of behavior and to ensure

continued access to the general education curriculum (Hurwitz et al., 2021). By acknowledging

the professional dialog concerning inclusion, the validity of the assertion that students with

EBDs can effectively be included in the general education classrooms in greater proportions can

be supported by general and special education teachers (Zweers et al., 2020).

Educational leaders have an obligation to prepare general and special education teachers

to effectively implement responsive approaches to meet the needs of general and special

education students in public schools (Scott et al., 2022). However, these responsive approaches

are more significant for students with EBDs (Garland & Dieker, 2019). A key issue in inclusive

education is the ability of students with EBDs to develop positive peer relationships and develop age-appropriate skills in general education classes (Banks et al., 2018). Without this interaction with others in general education classes, it is difficult for EBD students to progress in school and in society (Karimah & Hasegawa, 2022). Over the years, research has shown that a large number of EBD students struggle to interact with others and develop friendships with their peers compared to students without an exceptionality (van den Berg & Stoltz, 2018). At times, many students with EBDs fail to identify boundaries and the early trauma that they may have endured in their lives carries over into the school environment (Whitlow et al., 2019). Despite the increasing number of SWD being placed in general education settings, the placement of students with EBDs in the least restricted environment (LRE) requires intervention, highly specialized instruction, and support to improve their academic, behavioral, and social skills (McKenna et al., 2022).

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

SWD have the legal right to be educated in the LRE as their general education peers to the maximum extent appropriate and the separation of these students may only occur when the severity of the disability is such that the use of services and supplemental aids may not be achieved in the inclusive setting (Harrison et al., 2019). As the legislative act, the Education for All Handicapped Children (EAHCA) states, all students with an exceptionality or disability have the legal right to be educated in a learning environment as close as possible to other general education students in the general education classroom (Cumming et al., 2021). Since the inception of the LRE over 40 years ago, there have been multiple revisions made throughout the years (McKenna et al., 2022). Within IDEA, the LRE is articulated broadly, with the use of services and supplementary supports a placement resulting in more restrictive settings should

only occur when the nature of the disability is such that education in the general education setting cannot be adequately accomplished (Reiner, 2018). However, there remain points of confusion among local educational agencies and school districts regarding its implementation and interpretation (Bolourian et al., 2020). Therefore, some teachers and educational leaders have suggested that the general education classroom may not be considered the LRE for all students, despite the law's language (Kurth et al., 2019).

Federal laws in the United States mandate that students with EBDs have access to the general education curriculum and these policies protect inclusive practices for EBD students (Harrison et al., 2019). These mandates classify a philosophical orientation within FAPE in the LRE, while explicitly requiring evidenced-based practices as well as other learning and behavioral strategies (van den Berg & Stoltz, 2018). There have been many reports by proponents of inclusion that the inclusion of students with special needs in the LRE can become more of a contributing factor of quality social interactions and positive school outcomes (Karimah & Hasegawa, 2022). The positive effect of the inclusion of students with and without exceptionalities in the LRE setting is why many educators have argued in support of these types of settings, which impact students' academic performance and social acceptance (Lanterman et al., 2021).

Under the LRE mandate, federal regulations require all schools to have a continuum of placements available to meet the needs of all students with special needs, regardless of their age (Zweers et al., 2019). The educational placement of the traditional LRE continuum model extends from the least restrictive end of the general education classroom settings to hospital homebound instruction on the most restrictive end of the continuum (Bacon & Pomponio, 2023). The students who require more extensive services, such as students with EBDs, are assigned to a

more restricted classroom placement (Whitlow et al., 2019). As the placement of EBD students in the LRE is mitigated, there can be misinterpretations and inconsistency in their placement (McKenna et al., 2022), which can cause a contentious environment between families and some schools (Rowe et al., 2023). Decisions may be decreased when it comes to the implementation of students with EBDs in the LRE because of concerns of educational inequality (Bolourian et al., 2020). There have been several issues over the LRE and classroom placement for SWD, as parents have increasingly pursued due process under procedural safeguards and parental participation authorized under IDEA (Dalgaard et al., 2022). Unfortunately, when the LRE is interpreted as placement in the local schools for SWD, inclusive education is considered to be more of an ideology rather than the intention of IDEA (Silvestri & Hartman, 2022).

Inclusive Classroom Settings

The commitment to include SWD in the classroom with general education students is defined as inclusive education (Van Mieghem et al., 2022). The concept of inclusion originated in human rights as a political initiative and was passed down from the United Nations to the government and then to schools (Gidlund, 2018). The first time the principle of inclusive education was recognized was at the World Conference on Special Needs Education in 1994 (Tiwari, 2023). IDEA influences inclusion because it allows legal grievances, but states through their own policies, may impact the degree of inclusion (Bacon & Pomponio, 2023). Public funding or the lack of public funding can have an adverse effect on inclusion, due to social policies within government entities (Westling, 2019). IDEA proposes that all school buildings possess adequate facilities to accommodate special needs students such as cool-off rooms, adequate restrooms, toilets for handicapped persons, and transporting areas for all children at all levels within that particular school environment (Jameson et al., 2020). Thus, emphasizing the

term *inclusive education*, which indicates that all students learn together in the same school and classroom learning environment (Ahmed et al., 2022).

Inclusive education provides opportunities for each student to learn in the same learning environment, as teachers collaborate with others in support of SWDs (Van Mieghem et al., 2022). Teachers play an underlining key role in shaping adolescents' inclusive experiences because these pupils are experiencing various feelings of acceptance at the adolescent age (Dimitrellou & Male, 2022). It is imperative to establish a positive school climate at this level because of the many social issues such as teasing, bullying, and violence that hinders a student's learning (Rukavina et al., 2019). If adequate academic interventions are not performed, the academic performance worsens in high school (Afacan & Wilkerson, 2019). According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, less than 10% of eighth grade SWD performed above proficiency in mathematics in inclusive classroom settings (Morris et al., 2022). Moreover, the Nation's Report Card reported that only 10% of eight graders with disabilities scored proficient in reading, warranting additional concerns (O'Connor et al., 2019). SWD disruptive behaviors in middle school were associated with poor grades across all core content areas, loss of teaching time, and poor social interactions with their general education peers (Zoromski et al., 2021).

General and Social Inclusion

In the United States and other countries around the world, as one of the priorities of educational reform agendas, there is a growing move to include SWD in general education classrooms with their general education peers and in their local community (Van Mieghem et al., 2022). There is teamwork with teachers, parents, and students involved in prevention and intervention practice, influencing inclusive environment outcomes (Inbar-Furst & Landau, 2022).

Merely placing SWD in a classroom environment with their general education peers does not automatically mean that their communication skills or social interaction will facilitate improvement in the inclusive setting (Bogush et al., 2022). However, the use of necessary strategies and evidence-based practices can increase the probability of SWD progressing adequately and reaching their full potential academically and socially in the classroom environment, as well as effectively interacting with others in their community (Verret et al., 2022). Building an inclusive and active society is predicated on providing support for all students in school and in the community (Gagnon, 2022).

Two types of inclusion are easily noticed in an effective inclusive classroom environment (McGuire & Meadan, 2022). The two types are general and social inclusion (Banks et al., 2018). General inclusion is when there are general and special education students actively participating and showing achievement in academic classroom activities (Van Mieghem et al., 2022). Inclusion in the classroom often requires two or more certified educators to be present with general and special education students in the classroom (Jackson et al., 2017). Social inclusion involves the integration of students being actively engaged with others in the classroom and school communities, having equal participation and opportunities for reciprocal and positive relationships with adults and peers (Vyrastekova, 2021). It is well recognized that inclusion in the classroom must go well beyond the physical inclusion of students (van den Berg & Stoltz, 2018), but involve meaningful social interaction where they have relationships, friendships, and contacts as other students (McGuire & Meadan, 2022). There is limited research on practices that can guide educators in promoting communication and social interaction between students in inclusive classroom settings (Bacon & Pomponio, 2023).

Promoting social change in special education exposes the exclusion that exists in nominally inclusive schools and redirects education toward inclusive practices in the classroom and the surrounding community (Bartlett & Freeze, 2019). There are some advantages and disadvantages for SWD when it comes to community life and relationships with others (Robinson et al., 2021). When determining which intervention practices to use for professionals who provide services to various learners, they are urged to look at adjacent fields specifically from those students with severe, multiple disabilities, or students who have behavioral needs (Kwon et al., 2023). In addition, when there are general education students engaged in the interventions the teacher provides, the general education students serve as models and assist their SWD peers (Evashkovsky & Osipova, 2023). Some disadvantages for SWDs, when it comes to community life and relationships with others, are that SWDs are less likely to be employed and more likely to experience impoverished living conditions in their community (Robinson et al., 2021). Many students with EBDs experience low social competence and find it difficult to cooperate and have positive relations in interpersonal interactions in social environments (De Swart et al., 2023). The ability to function effectively in a social environment is social competence (De Swart et al., 2023). These difficulties have far-reaching consequences in the future if there is no change socially in the school environment and the community (Inbar-Furst & Landau, 2022).

During the adolescence phase of SWD, communication issues with peers can negatively impact academic learning, functional independence, and social emotional development (Dimitrellou & Male, 2022). Therefore, early and continuous intervention in the areas of functional and social development is imperative for the development of improving communication skills (Blackwell & Stockall, 2021). The social learning model is relied on by

theories of peer relations (Rukavina et al., 2019). This social learning model argues that students are mostly influenced by the company they keep (Banks et al., 2018). It declares that students learn appropriate and inappropriate behaviors from their peer group (Moore et al., 2022). Behavioral, social, and school related skills are learned from peers and adults through interactions in social institutions such as classroom environments (Yell, 2019). Although SWD may have a willingness to communicate with their peers, a lack of pragmatic language skills may isolate them without a notable reason (Shenton, 2004). Generally, SWD verbal communication may lack appropriate responses, topic maintenance, cohesive devices, or lack of initiation (Sanders et al., 2018).

In recent years, it has become common practice to place SWD in classroom settings with general education students, in order to prepare general and special education students for today's society (Francisco et al., 2020). Positive classroom engagement between educators and peers encourages all-around positive morale for all students (McKenna et al., 2022). Modifying practices can provide effective interventions to meet the needs of SWDs, relating to their social and communication skills (Owens & Lo, 2022). Teachers often implement activities to boost social interaction between general and special education students, where students can earn points individually or as a group for positive social involvement and abiding by classroom rules (De Swart et al., 2023). Some teachers feel the inclusion of special and general education students is vital to academic and social growth of special needs students, but other teachers do not support this practice among students (Van Mieghem et al., 2022). For this reason, there are teachers that do not feel academic or social change is necessary (Verret et al., 2022). For teachers to have success in the inclusive classroom, effective strategies must be implemented for students (Kwon et al., 2023).

Inclusive Strategies

A variety of strategies are needed for effective inclusion at the individual, small group, and classroom levels (Krajnc, 2018). For the individual, strategies include embracing students' interest in activities and engaging in one-on-one time in or outside the classroom setting (Bolourian et al., 2022; Evashkovsky & Osipova, 2023). When including SWD in inclusive small groups, strategies such as brainstorming on a particular topic may be effective (Li et al., 2023). Brainstorming is done for students to give their input concerning a particular topic and learn from other students' input in a timely manner (Sabayleh & Sakarneh, 2023). For teachers instructing SWD in a whole classroom setting, strategies such as humanism-based instructional strategies have been effectively practiced, which are student-centered and highlight each student's motivators and needs (Al-Shammari, 2021). This practice promotes intrinsic motivation and avoids the need for students to rely on outside praise (Mutter et al., 2023). Today, general and special education teachers are required to implement strategies for accommodating SWDs in meeting rigorous grade-level standards and demonstrating progress toward measurable individualized goals in supporting inclusive practices (Mathews et al., 2023).

An effective strategy for supporting inclusive practices in the inclusive classroom setting is incidental teaching, which is an interaction between individuals that occur naturally in everyday situations (Sanders et al., 2018). Whenever an SWD shows some sort of interest in something within the classroom environment, that student's interest becomes the subject of the teacher's teaching for that particular instructional class period (Sanderson & Goldman, 2023). The teacher structures the classroom environment around the students' interest in order to initiate conversations for the development of an interacting socially inclusive classroom community (Blackwell & Stockall, 2021; Cosma & Soni, 2019). Incidental teaching involves the

arrangement of an inclusive classroom environment, to start conversations specific to the students' age, skills, and interests while addressing specific language targets (Blackwell & Stockall, 2021; McGuire & Meadan, 2022).

Differentiating Instruction in Inclusive Settings

Differentiation in the classroom is defined as instruction tailored to meet an individual's needs (Rodgers et al., 2021). Differentiating is critical in the context of creating classroom inclusivity and effectively accommodating general and special education students individually in a collective manner (Gheyssens et al., 2021). Over the last quarter century, the work of general and special education teachers has become increasingly complex and specialized for individual special education students, demanding a high level of skill in delivering, determining, and designing the effectiveness of IEPs (Evashkovsky & Osipova, 2023). This is reflected in pivotal court cases and policy changes that have occurred over the past few years in the educational field (Mathews et al., 2023). In order to meet FAPE standards, the instructional content in the classroom needs to be individualized for SWD (Sanders et al., 2018). This is especially apparent with the labeling and placement of students with EBDs (Yell, 2019).

The labeling and treatment of students in the special education classroom continue to operate with a deficit focus, despite IDEA's emphasis on the LRE and FAPE (Lanterman et al., 2021). Operating with a deficit focus means that teachers and educational leaders continue to treat SWD different from their general education peers, by placing SWD in a more restrictive setting than the previous setting, as soon as an issue arises (Van Mieghem et al., 2022). In addition, teachers' perceptions and treatment of SWD are based upon a pre-existing view of how the student should respond to the teachers' redirection or instructional teaching (Cosma & Soni, 2019). With the various challenges and multiple demands of teachers in the inclusive educational

environment, there is widespread acknowledgment that pedagogy is out of sync and that general education teachers are not utilizing the teacher-learning practices suitable for an inclusive educational setting for general or special education students (Brazzolotto & Phelps, 2021). The labels placed on the SWD become more of a detriment, than serving as an eligibility category for learning how to support and accommodate SWD according to their individual needs (Murza & Ehren, 2020).

The labeling and treatment of students with EBDs contribute to an unequal system of educating them in the public school system (Lanterman et al., 2021). Students with EBDs are more likely to be placed in a nonintegrated specialized setting than other SWDs (Alkahtani, 2022). However, a multifaceted long-term approach can be a goal of ensuring successful full inclusion of students with EBDs and other SWD in the inclusive classroom environment (Zabeli et al., 2021). There is a higher willingness of general and special education teachers to differentiate instruction in an inclusive classroom setting with students who have learning disabilities, whereas with students with EBDs, there is very little willingness from the same teachers (Lübke et al., 2019). Teachers' interactions with EBD students can be enhanced with a sense of responsibility for students' progression (Rodríguez et al., 2021), from pathognomonic to interventionist beliefs (Lanterman & Applequist, 2018). Pathognomonic beliefs are the mindset that the disability of a student is fixed and no progression could be sustained (Zhang & Markon, 2021). In contrast, teachers with interventionist beliefs feel that SWD can show progression in any area with taught skills (Hochtritt, 2019). Therefore, there is a difference in the attitudes of teachers educating students with EBDs (Rodríguez et al., 2021).

Today, differentiating instruction in an inclusive classroom setting is known to be the standard way of educating students effectively according to their independent needs (Graham et

al., 2021). However, when schools place students with EBDs in self-contained classrooms

instead of the inclusive classroom setting, less differentiating of instruction is performed which

causes a lack of instructional quality (Benner et al., 2020). Poor outcomes persist as EBD

students continue to experience isolation in the classroom with limited praise, academic

feedback, and opportunities to respond (Cumming et al., 2021). The instructional content is

seldom of high quality in the self-contained setting (Zagona et al., 2022); therefore, it is

challenging to retain quality educators that will give effective instruction to students with EBDs

(Bettini et al., 2019).

Addressing Barriers in Inclusive Settings

As general and special education teachers remain to be an essential component of

educational inclusion there manages to be a rising pupil to teacher ratio, a lack of autonomy over

content, as well as a weak network of professional teachers (Van Mieghem et al., 2022). In

primary schools, children with disabilities endure exclusion and considerable prejudice from the

general educational system, which creates many negative consequences for their education

(Virani & Ali, 2022). In recent years, there has been a distinct shift from a medical model of

disability to a focus on the cultural and social factors that can act as barriers to students

achieving their goals and having their needs met functionally and academically (Chambers et al.,

2020). High-quality inclusive practices are provided to all students when barriers are addressed

in the inclusive classroom (Soares et al., 2022). There are various barriers experienced by

students with EBDs and other students with exceptionalities that are as diverse as a lack of

funding for additional support, inappropriate assessment methods, or barriers related to rigid

curriculum (Kielblock & Woodcock, 2023). This adds to the ongoing attitudinal barriers that

need to be observed from a broader perspective (Garwood & Van Loan, 2019). Ideally, the

inclusion of students in the classroom would reduce the barriers by locating the problem in the student rather than a change in the environment and circumstances surrounding the student (Van Mieghem et al., 2022).

Inclusion takes on many forms in the public-school system as disability biases are prevalent in the classrooms; some individual supports and aides are used to assist the student by reducing barriers and enhancing engagement between all students (Zabeli et al., 2021). Over the past 20 years, there are a range of factors affecting the implementation of inclusive education for SWD operating at different levels (Ahmed et al., 2022), such as a lack of resources and infrastructure for the inclusion of SWD, which can be scarce in certain areas in the United States (Park et al., 2021). The transformative role of inclusive education does not only apply to the classroom, but to the entire infrastructure of the educational school environment (Chambers et al., 2020). Rather than addressing environmental or institutional barriers, most research focuses on improving the skills of students with special needs (Gheyssens et al., 2021), which can be the key to inclusive disability development for students (Knopik et al., 2022). Improving their learning skills and increasing classroom involvement decreases exclusion from other students in the inclusive setting (Van Mieghem et al., 2022). Children with significant disabilities have distinct learning demands that require a specialized setting to facilitate their participation in the classroom, which enhances their chances of being successful, and building positive qualities before reaching the middle school level (Rukavina et al., 2019).

SWD and Relationships

General education students declared that general education or inclusive classroom settings were appropriate environments to form peer relationships with SWD (de Swart et al., 2023). However, some students with special needs felt isolated at times in the same inclusive

environments (McGuire & Meadan, 2022). Despite these mixed reports (McGuire & Meadan, 2022), general education students continued to spend less time with their special needs peers and more time with other general education students (Weiss et al., 2021). However, this problem was due to barriers associated with a lack of social inclusion by general education teachers (Bogush et al., 2022), in addition to inclusive strategies and techniques that should be implemented for the progression of all general and special education students (Blackwell & Stockall, 2021). Social interaction and increased communication between peers are needed, especially in inclusive settings (Lawrence et al., 2010). When there is a relationship between a reward and a communicative response students learn at a more rapid pace, which leads to fewer behavior issues in the classroom environment (de Swart et al., 2023). For example, a SWD may be rewarded for enunciating an object correctly and receiving the object, rather than receiving points on a chart as a reward (Sanderson & Goldman, 2023).

There can also be animosity between the general and special education students in the same classroom environment (Inbar-Furst & Landau, 2022). General education students feel that special treatment is shown toward SWD and students that exhibit EBDs (Ennis & Katsiyannis, 2018) because favorable conditions for examinations are provided, as well as lenient consequences when SWD misbehave in the classroom environment (Sanderson & Goldman, 2023). This can have an adverse impact on the inclusive class dynamics with feelings of unfair practices toward SWD (Kurth & Jackson, 2022). Therefore, educators who are qualified in the dynamics of special education practices can sensitize the process of assisting general education students in understanding that disabilities and misbehaviors lead to disadvantages (Weiss et al., 2021). The attention that is shown toward SWD is to compensate for their exceptionalities, which all individuals possess in their own way (Knopik et al., 2022).

There is a growing need to understand how teachers perceive students with EBDs due to the number of students with exceptionalities growing rapidly in the public-school systems in the United States (Alkahtani, 2022). Teacher-student relationships can be strongly influenced by problem behaviors from students that are in the category of having a behavioral disorder (Inbar-Furst & Landau, 2022). A teacher-student relationship that is conflictual represents a risk factor that could lead to coercion escalations in students and disruptions in the classroom environment with other students (Conroy et al., 2022). At the core of student development, teachers building relationships with their students is very important, as it provides students with social competencies essential to mastering social challenges (Berchiatti et al., 2022). Teachers who have the proper training in understanding the importance of positive teacher-student relationships have a greater opportunity in managing their classroom environment with students that have EBDs or multiple exceptionalities (Whitlow et al., 2019).

There is a vast amount of literature that specifies an association between emotional behavioral outcomes in students and their relationships with teachers (Sanders et al., 2018). Some general education teachers are pushing out SWD (Inbar-Furst & Landau, 2022), particularly students with EBDs, from their classrooms because of the lack of training these teachers receive for teaching in an inclusive classroom setting and the potential to have low assessment scores from the special needs students who are attributed to the teacher's overall classroom test scores (Ahmed et al., 2022). Teacher-student relationships were more positive when teachers attended professional development programs working with EBDs (Conroy et al., 2022).

Self-Contained Settings

In the special education field, a self-contained classroom is a specialized classroom setting where instructional content is taught to students diagnosed with a disorder or with a disability in the same learning environment (Jackson et al., 2017). Historically, SWD were segregated from their peers to learn instructional content at a separate school (Adamson et al., 2019), until the integration of general and special education students in school and society in the 1940s (Oelrich, 2012). In the 1950s, state courts ruled in favor of schools to exclude students who had limited intelligence or were disruptive in the school learning environment (Yell 2019). The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s became the catalyst of change not only for minorities but for individuals with disabilities as well (Turnage, 2020). The self-contained classroom setting is a different learning environment than the inclusive classroom setting (Karimah & Hasegawa, 2022). In the inclusive classroom setting general and special education students are taught content in the same learning environment (Anggrawan et al., 2023). In previous years, SWD with complex support needs were given specialized instruction to meet functional and social needs in the self-contained classroom setting once they entered the public school system (Mahabbati et al., 2022).

These self-contained classrooms were deemed necessary and beneficial for SWD with instruction being taught in smaller classroom settings, and specific individualized teaching according to their skill level (Mooney & Ryan, 2022); however, allowing these students to be separated from their general education peers and from instructional content taught by highly qualified teachers (Kurth & Jackson, 2022). Nationally, about 33% of students with EBDs are in a self-contained setting (Mathews et al., 2021). There is concern for students with EBDs in self-contained settings with consistently identified substantial problems with both poor instructional quality of content taught and working conditions for teachers (Cumming et al., 2021). Poor

working conditions for teachers affect their morale to teach students and cause unnecessary stressful conditions on the job (Anggrawan et al., 2023). In the self-contained setting, teachers are encouraged to increase behavioral praise toward EBD students and decrease reprimands (Murphy & Johnson, 2023). These practices increase the probability of EBD students being successful in the LRE (Orr et al., 2020), which may be the self-contained classroom setting (Zweers et al., 2019).

Placement of SWD

Placement decisions for SWD are complex and present unique challenges for each student in the school district (Zweers et al., 2019). Educational placement is an operative principle that is not fixed (Ferolino & Yap, 2023), in which specific educational instruction is given to students and is intended to guide IEP teams in making the best decisions to support the unique learning needs of SWD (Stone, 2019). The IEP team consists of the special education teacher, a general education teacher, the child's parent, and the district's special education department representative (Mahabbati et al., 2022). This IEP team makes the placement decision for the child that exhibits a disability or disorder (Cole et al., 2021). In the United States, placement decisions are largely based on the SWD's educational needs in elementary school (Webster & De Boer, 2021) and whether the SWD was experiencing significant mathematics or reading difficulties by performance on independently administered, untimed, and psychometrically measures (Morgan et al., 2023).

The guidance regarding educational placement of SWD has become one of the most contentious points in the LRE mandate (Wilson et al., 2020). Therefore, in recent years IEP teams have been given more latitude in assigning placement for SWD, with a growing emphasis on supporting these students to make progress in gaining access to the general education

curriculum in the inclusive classroom environment along with general education students (Lanterman et al., 2021). According to the US Department of Education (2020), about 30% of students with learning disabilities, 35% of students with other health impairments, and 51% of students with EBD spend less than 80% of their school day in general education classrooms (Morgan et al., 2023). Moreover, SWD who spent 80% or more of their time in a general education-inclusive classroom did significantly better in both math and reading assessment scores than their peers who spent more time in the self-contained classroom setting (Cole et al., 2021). In the general education classrooms, SWD can receive intensive, effective, and specialized instruction to their unique learning needs (Mathews et al., 2023). In comparison, these unique learning needs are not regularly addressed in the self-contained setting with other SWD (Zweers et al., 2019). However, the debate is ongoing concerning placement practices for students with extensive support needs or who exhibited behavior issues in the classroom with general education students (Murphy & Johnson, 2023).

Most general education teachers in general education classrooms suggested more restrictive placements for students who exhibited behavioral issues in their classrooms (Alkahtani, 2022; Mahabbati et al., 2022). For this reason, there has been an ongoing and persistent concern in schools across the country of disparity placement for students with EBDs (Ferolino & Yap, 2023; Garland & Dieker, 2019). Data show that there are negative long-term outcomes associated with students with EBDs placed in the most restrictive settings, behaviorally and academically (Garwood & Van Loan, 2019). The qualitative differences between placement and inclusion can be discussed by educators as the placement trends are reported (Evashkovsky & Osipova, 2023; Lanterman et al., 2021). For students with EBDs, between 1990 and 2007, the rate of general education placement increased by 105% (McKenna

et al., 2022). In light of IDEA, these statistics from the Americans with Disabilities Act on placements in the LRE are concerning (Ennis & Katsiyannis, 2018).

Co-teaching in Inclusive Settings

The role of the general and special education teacher in an inclusive setting can be complex, as they are usually not prepared to collaborate with other educators to serve SWD in the inclusive classroom setting (Garland & Dieker, 2019; Pizana, 2022). Ideally, in an inclusive classroom setting there is a general and special education teacher delivering substantive instruction (Webster & De Boer, 2021) deliberately and flexibly accommodating the needs of a diverse group of students together in the general education classroom (Jackson et al., 2017). There are few educational systems throughout the country that require cross-training in special education and general core content courses (Mason et al., 2021), leaving both content and special education teachers to remediate the gaps that exist in their practice (Soares et al., 2022). In some classrooms, the general and special education teachers are granted a paraprofessional or paraeducator, which is known as a teacher assistant who holds a unique role in supporting special education students with various disabilities in the areas of behavioral emotional support, social skills, academic instruction, and personal care (Mason et al., 2021).

Under the supervision of a certified general or special education teacher, the paraprofessional is authorized to perform a number of both instructional and non-instructional roles in the self-contained and inclusive classroom setting (Filderman et al., 2022). Paraprofessionals are expected to assist general and special education students in various educational environments on school grounds, in the classroom, gymnasium, or outdoors (Evashkovsky & Osipova, 2023). Paraprofessionals play significant roles in the functional and social progression of SWD and are vital members of the special education team (Soares et al.,

2022). In inclusive classrooms, novice general and special education teachers report that stress is a major factor for burnout on their jobs in their early years (Ndivhuwo et al., 2022). However, working collaboratively in the classroom with paraprofessionals and other teachers really builds their morale and encourages them during this difficult time (Garwood & Ampuja, 2019).

There are cases where the special education teacher will be assisted by the paraprofessional and a general education teacher in the same inclusive classroom setting (Kurth & Jackson, 2022). This support can be bidirectional, where the novice special education teacher is supported by an experienced general education teacher and paraprofessional or the special education teacher actively mentors both the general education teacher and the paraprofessional (Sanderson & Goldman, 2023). The roles between the special education teacher and paraprofessional are interdependent as well as interwoven, as they share responsibilities working closely in the classroom educating SWD (Mason et al., 2021). They work together to address students' needs and assist one another in helping their SWD reach their individualized goals in the classroom and school environment (Soares et al., 2022). However, paraprofessionals are often stretched thin (Filderman et al., 2022). There are reports that 40% of paraprofessionals do not feel valued or respected by school personnel (Evashkovsky & Osipova, 2023). Paraprofessionals are constantly given inappropriate work assignments with a lack of supervision in performing various tasks (Mason et al., 2021). A classroom with effective management strategies placed by teachers, has paraprofessionals that possess satisfactory working alliances with teachers and students (Fritzsche & Köpfer, 2022).

Professional Development

Special education teachers hold a complex role that requires extensive training and integrative preparation (Bruhn et al., 2023). Reducing teacher burnout and stress while

improving social and literacy wellness of students with EBDs can only occur when teachers have been equipped to manage behaviors and deliver resourceful instruction (Conroy et al., 2022). However, educator preparation programs provide minimal instruction in emotional and social learning for students, which leaves teachers unprepared to support students effectively with EBDs or those who have other disabilities (Benner et al., 2022). The unique challenges that teachers face in the classroom setting with students with EBDs are rarely addressed in teacher preparation programs (Filderman et al., 2022). The role of teachers and the potential for preparation programs are explored to teach educators to embrace students with EBDs and improve the numbers of inclusion for these students and others with special needs (Lanterman et al., 2021).

Given the challenges of supporting teachers in educating SWD, there is a definite need for professional learning and development for teachers (Hirsch et al., 2022). A major problem in educational systems is a lack of funding for professional development programs for teachers who are required to teach SWD in inclusive classroom settings (Ahmed et al., 2022). However, there is potential for professional development programs to have a profound impact on the well-being of students with EBDs and other students with exceptionalities, with the increased funding from government programs for teachers in inclusive classroom environments (Scott et al., 2022). Professional development is a way to expand teachers' knowledge, with a variety type of programs used across the field of education (Webster & De Boer, 2021). Some educators believe professional development programs for general and special education teachers are the key to success for productive classroom management in self-contained and inclusive classroom settings (Healy et al., 2020). There should be a clear purpose for professional development for teachers

with specific content which provides a concrete context with built-in supports for learning and activities that foster conversations, peer interactions, and collaboration (Filderman et al., 2022).

Teacher learning is a multi-faceted experience dependent on an integrated bundle of contexts and factors with multiple points of engagement (Harbour et al., 2022). As the educational system and society grow in our country and around the world, there are ongoing changes in the special education field with definitions and thresholds for identification that require professional learning for teachers and educational officials (Evashkovsky & Osipova, 2023). From a transnational perspective, in order to enable successful inclusion for teachers, a professional developmental learning program must include interprofessional and collaborative training for general and special education teachers and the teachers must acknowledge that the potential problems they face will be multifaceted (van den Berg & Stoltz, 2018). By using a combination of professional practices from a variety of professional development programs, rather than using practices from a single session or one approach, teachers have reported a change for the better in their practice in the classroom (Bruno et al., 2021). Professional development programs are more successful when they are geared toward the teachers' interest and the activities are meaningful to their practice using constant feedback with continuous training (Webster & De Boer, 2021). Classroom pedagogy, teachers' content knowledge, and student learning increase when teachers fully engage and are confident in the strategies taught in the professional development programs (Brazzolotto & Phelps, 2021).

In targeting the unique needs of students with EBDs, unfortunately teachers receive limited to no professional development in classroom management practices (State et al., 2019). Teacher education programs can be modified to meet the distinctive needs of certain students with certain disabilities or disorders in certain environments (Hirsch et al., 2022). These

programs are especially relevant for inclusive educators who are preparing to educate special needs students with various disabilities (Scott et al., 2022). It is apparent that teacher education programs are productive for students who are in inclusive classrooms with general and special education teachers (Evashkovsky & Osipova, 2023). Students with EBDs greatly benefit from participating in certain subject areas in general education classrooms from teachers who have participated in educational programs (Filderman et al., 2022). However, because of the behaviors students with EBDs are known to exhibit in class, they are frequently excluded from general education classrooms and do not receive quality instruction as other students without EBDs (Garland & Dieker, 2019).

At times, fundamental changes are necessary for developing quality educators for the achievement of students in self-contained and inclusive classroom settings (Liu et al., 2020). Educational training and teacher preparation are ways educational systems can meet the demand of highly qualified teachers who understand the role of supplying students with skills to achieve success academically and socially in the classroom (Mathews et al., 2023). Teachers' overall knowledge of inclusion comes from the policy of the Educational Act and their own experiences (Gidlund, 2018). Numerous teachers in the educational system have been teaching for many years and have never received any formal training for educating SWD in an inclusive classroom setting (Kielblock & Woodcock, 2023). In addition, over 50% of general education teachers lacked experience in educating SWD in an inclusive classroom setting (Ahmed et al., 2022).

Summary

A review of the literature reveals that students with EBDs are faced with many challenges that can be addressed in the educational learning environment. Teachers are challenged to educate general and special education students in the same learning environment without being

fully equipped to accommodate students with EBDs. As a result, teachers struggle in their everyday routine, to implement evidence-based instructional practices pedagogically to students with EBDs in the inclusive classroom setting (Filderman et al., 2022). This study can potentially fill the gap of students with EBDs being effectively integrated academically and socially in the inclusive classroom setting by general and special education teachers. The self-determination theory properly allows educators to learn from their experiences of applying strategies and techniques in accommodating students with EBDs in the inclusive classroom setting, improving professional practice.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

This hermeneutic phenomenological study sought to understand the experiences of public high school teachers educating students with EBDs in inclusive classroom settings. This chapter begins with a discussion of the study's design followed by research questions for the participants. The setting, participants, procedures, and techniques of how the data was collected and analyzed are described in this chapter. A personal biography of the researcher and the trustworthiness practices of this study are also discussed. A summary concludes the chapter.

Research Design

Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive and theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning of individuals to a problem (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Qualitative research seeks to explore a problem that has been identified and seeks to understand society through individual choice and response (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Plust et al., 2021). The qualitative method was most fitting for my study because quantifying the experiences of teachers instructing students with EBDs would be very limited to behaviors that could be tallied using the quantitative method. Instead, I looked to construct a rich understanding of experiences, which is done qualitatively. This study uses a qualitative design to investigate the participants in their natural settings.

While qualitative methodology has been chosen, there are several designs that operate using qualitative methods. For this study, phenomenological design was chosen. Phenomenological research attempts to set aside biases and direct the interest of the study to the individuals' lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2016; van Manen, 2017). This approach utilizes the participants' perspectives and understandings of the phenomenon and illuminated the

specifics of the phenomenon (van Manen, 2017). In order to gain an understanding of educators' experiences of students with EBDs in an inclusive classroom setting, a phenomenological design was most appropriate. A phenomenological study deals with the "what" and the "how" of individuals' experience of a common phenomenon in order to describe the essence of such phenomenon (van Manen, 2017). Phenomenology seeks to search through a vivid and accurate rendering of the experience, rather than ratings and scores (Creswell & Poth, 2016; van Manen, 2017). The focus was on the experiences of the teachers on a high school level. I have chosen this design for my study because I am intimately connected with the phenomenon and have a personal interest in what I am seeking to know, which is at the heart of phenomenological research (Moustakes, 1994; van Manen, 2017).

A hermeneutic phenomenological approach is fitting for this research which provides a central meaning that leads to new prejudgments regarding the phenomenon (van Manen, 2017). Hermeneutics, meaning interpretive or explanatory, is the theory and methodology of interpretation (van Manen, 2017). Hermeneutics originated with the Reformers of the sixteenth century. Later, Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) developed a more contemporary form of hermeneutics, making way for Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and Hans-George Gadamer (1900-2002) to develop hermeneutic phenomenology (Creswell & Poth, 2016; van Manen, 2017). A hermeneutical phenomenological approach grants an in-depth understanding of the experiences of the participants answering questions from the interviewer (Neubauer et al., 2019; van Manen, 2017). A qualitative hermeneutic phenomenology research design was used to examine the lived experiences of public high school teachers in the inclusive classroom setting educating students with EBDs. Because of my extensive experience with the study's central phenomenon, a hermeneutical phenomenology design was conducted. I chose hermeneutic phenomenology over

transcendental because hermeneutic phenomenology requires reflective interpretation of a study to achieve meaningful understanding (van Manen, 2017). Hermeneutic phenomenology is an interpretive process in an individual's world of life (van Manen, 2017), whereas transcendental is descriptive (Moustakas, 1994). Because of my extensive experience educating students with EBDs, the interpretive design was appropriate.

Research Questions

This study was guided by one central research question and three sub-questions:

Central Research Question

What are the shared experiences of public high school teachers instructing students with emotional behavior disorders (EBDs) in inclusive classroom settings?

Sub-Question One

What challenges do high school teachers experience while instructing students with emotional behavior disorders (EBDs) in inclusive classroom settings?

Sub-Question Two

What are the relatedness experiences of public high school teachers instructing students with emotional behavior disorders (EBDs) in inclusive classroom settings?

Sub-Question Three

What are the competence experiences of public high school teachers instructing students with emotional behavior disorders (EBDs) in inclusive classroom settings?

Setting and Participants

The setting of this qualitative study was a rural school district in the state of Georgia and the participants were general education high school teachers. The setting and participants in this study were carefully chosen in order to meet the purpose of the study or understand the factors

that impact general education teachers' perceptions of students with EBDs in public high schools in inclusive classroom settings. The teachers were purposely and carefully chosen to ensure they have all experienced the phenomenon at the heart of the phenomenological design. These participants are fitting, since the hermeneutical phenomenology approach is to examine the lived experiences of the participants (van Manen, 2017). Criterion sampling was done to select the participants who have experienced the phenomenon in this qualitative study to gather information-rich data (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Criterion sampling's most basic concept based on pre-established criteria is to include appropriate situations (Karademir et al., 2020). This section provides an in-depth overview of the setting and participants for this study.

Setting

The setting of my research was in Major School District, located in a rural community in the state of Georgia. The graduation rate in Major School District is 92%. This school district is one of the fastest growing counties in the state of Georgia with a total of 31 schools; 18 are elementary schools, eight are middle schools, five are high schools, and one is a virtual academy. The five high schools were the schools that served as the sites for this study. I aimed to interview at least two teachers from each high school. The minority enrollment is 44% of the student body (majority Black). It is less than the Georgia public school average of 62% minority school enrollment (majority Black).

The district ranks among the top 20% of public-school districts in the state of Georgia and in the top 10% academically. Math proficiency is in the top 20% of Georgia districts. The Reading/Language Arts proficiency is in the top 10%. The graduation rate is in the top 20. This school district was chosen for this study because the schools in the area have a very diverse population of students. There are a total of 1753 teachers and approximately 28,266 total

students in the school district, which is a 16:1 student to teacher ratio. There are approximately

2400 students in the elementary and middle schools that have an IEP and 750 high school

students in the district that have an IEP. Seven percent of those students are classified as having

an EBD. There are 62 special education high school teachers in the Major school district that

instruct SWD. There are 46 co-taught teachers in the inclusive classroom setting. There are a

total of 18 teachers in the self-contained setting that instruct SWD and four of those teachers

instruct students with EBDs in their self-contained classroom.

The organizational and leadership structure of the district consists of a lead principal,

along with four assistant principals for grades 9-12. A local educational agent (LEA) is a liaison

between the high school special education department and the county district special education

department. The LEA represents the school district in an official capacity. There is often an

assistant principal who is designated to advocate for the special education students in the

building and can often serve as an LEA at any given IEP meeting if an LEA from the county

district is not readily available.

Participants

The participants of the study were 12 general education high school teachers and two

special education teachers selected in Major District with at least one year of experience teaching

students with EBDs in the public school system in an inclusive classroom setting. The teachers

were selected by using the criterion sampling approach. The teachers had at least one student in

their classroom with an EBD. The participants had at least one year of experience in an inclusive

classroom teaching students with EBDs at the high school level.

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Researcher Positionality

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My motivation for conducting this study was to understand the experiences of teachers

educating students with EBDs in the inclusive classroom. As a veteran teacher in the field of

special education, I continue to witness teachers who are not properly trained to educate students

with EBDs in the inclusive classroom setting. I have witnessed this lack of training in two school

districts. The lack of training given to these teachers has a negative effect on the students with

EBDs and on the unqualified teacher (Evashkovsky & Osipova, 2023). The general and special

education students in the inclusive classroom suffer because of the lack of instruction taught to

the students in the classroom and teachers leaving the profession because of teacher burn-out

from a lack of training and knowledge of how to properly educate general and special education

students in an inclusive classroom environment. Therefore, I have developed a passion for

understanding the correlation between a successful inclusive classroom environment and an

inclusive classroom environment that is not successful in hopes of contributing to a solution for

this problem in the special education field.

Interpretive Framework

As a researcher, I believe gathering a variety of perspectives from participants in a study

allows the researcher to develop a theory, with rich data collected from multiple viewpoints. In

social constructivism, the researcher relies heavily on a variety of views from individuals in

order to develop a pattern of meaning or theory rather than start with a theory (Creswell & Poth,

2018; Tang et al., 2023). A researcher can focus on the specific contexts in which people live, by

recognizing that their own background shapes their interpretations which flow from their own

personal, historical, and cultural experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). In the

social constructivism paradigm, a person seeks knowledge and understanding of the world in

which an individual works and lives (Creswell & Poth, 2018; King, 2018). From a social

constructivist perspective, reality evolves through what is real and interpersonal interactions,

reality is not based on objective fact (King, 2018). A theoretically unique decision-making approach in social constructivism places the decision-making model into the social context itself and takes it out of the head of the decision-maker (Dempsey et al., 2021). The goal of social constructivists in research is to rely heavily on the participants' views of the situation or study (Deulen, 2013). Therefore, I will be led to look for a variety of views, rather than narrowing the meanings into only a few categories (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These subjected views are formulated through the interactions of the participants with other individuals (Moustakas, 1994). This relates well to my study, as I will be conducting interviews consisting of multiple individuals, individually and in focus groups. As a social constructivist, I will look to the participants to describe their experiences and provide their meaning; this is best accomplished through strong open-ended interview questions and active listening (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Philosophical Assumptions

The importance and understanding of philosophical assumptions as an element of research begins with assessing where it fits within the process of research and considering how to actively write it into a qualitative study (Qazi Ha, 2011). In a developing study, philosophical assumptions are usually the first ideas. Researchers have always been encouraged to underpin methodological stances with rigorous and robust philosophical assumptions (Mazandarani, 2022). Philosophical assumptions must be integrated into a study if ethical considerations are explained throughout the conduct of the study. It is, therefore, contradictory if philosophical assumptions are not noted (Mazandarani, 2022). Philosophical assumptions must be identified in a study to avoid misunderstandings and reduce ambiguities (Halvorsen, 2019). My ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions are discussed below.

Ontological Assumption

Ontological is a philosophical assumption about reality that is internal to the knower (Neubauer et al., 2019). In qualitative research, something is real when it's built in the minds of the individuals involved in a situation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a researcher presents different perspectives from multiple individuals when conducting qualitive research, the researcher is embracing the idea of multiple realities (Qazi Ha. 2011). Based on the ontological claim that human beings are always already engaged purposively in the world, in contrast to the dominant intellectual tradition, is hermeneutic realism (Yanchar, 2015). In our relationship with experience, an unconstrained and careful analysis of ontological categorizations and metaphysical assumptions of a study will give a more in-depth awareness of the essential theoretical choices (Neubauer et al., 2019; Valore et al., 2021). In the understanding of empirical data, ontological categorization can enlighten the relation between limits and the metaphysical framework that is presupposed to make sense of our experience (Valore et al., 2021). In this qualitative study, my ontological assumption is that there are multiple views of reality from a multitude of individuals when studying their perceptions concerning the phenomenon. As a researcher, I will be reflexive concerning the ontological nature of subjects that are used in the research as well as the epistemological assumptions underpinning methods of data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). In the form of intangible, multiple constructions that are socially based, I believe that realities are apprehendable.

Epistemological Assumption

Epistemological is a philosophical assumption that knowledge is known through the subjective experiences of people (Becker & Niehaves, 2007). Therefore, in a qualitative research study, it is imperative that the researcher develops a rapport with the participants and conducts the research in the field where the participants work and live (Qazi Ha, 2011). The longer a

researcher stays in the field with the participants the better understanding the researcher has of knowing what they know concerning the phenomena (Qazi Ha, 2011). My epistemological beliefs are that through experiences, facts can be known. I believe the more time I spend with the participants in this study, the more I will understand their experiences from their perspective.

Axiological Assumption

Axiology is the study of research, which prompts the researcher to reflect on the fundamental values essential to a research question (Kelly et al., 2018). In a study, qualitative researchers make their values known, even though all researchers bring values to a study (Gericke, J. W. 2012). Like synthesis in general, pursuing axiological integrity is about highlighting the important values, and rather than an absolute requirement, it is a matter of judgment (Kelly et al., 2018). In axiological assumption, the researcher acknowledges that biases are present in relation to their role in the study context and that research is value-laden (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I will seek to understand the experiences of teachers in the inclusive classroom setting and honestly report their perceptions and views. I will implement reflexivity to increase the transparency and trustworthiness of the study. Reflexivity will help me to ensure that the research practices are ethical by addressing the concerns from participants. I will seek to understand the research problem through the perspectives of the participants and use the results to assist the district leaders in understanding why teachers are not prepared to educate students with EBDs in the inclusive classroom environment.

Researcher's Role

I will serve as the human instrument for this study. My role will be to collect data, examine the data collected, effectively conceptualize the information received, and disseminate it (Creswell & Poth, 2016). My goal will be to use qualitative methods to understand the

experiences of individuals and report the findings by providing a realistic picture to help the reader experience the feeling of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The participants in this study are general education teachers who educate students with EBDs in high school. Some of the participants in this study may teach students at the same school I teach. However, I am not the supervisor of any of the participants neither are any of the participants my supervisor in this study. The questions that I developed for the participants in the study are from personal experience and collaborating with other teachers in teaching and developing EBD students in self-contained and inclusive classroom settings. I currently teach high school students with EBDs in a self-contained classroom setting. I collaborate with special and general education teachers for my students to reach their full potential academically, behaviorally, and functionally. This research design fits my study because of the experiences of the participants and providing a realistic picture to help the reader experience the feelings of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2016). As the researcher is taking a hermeneutic approach, it is inconsistent to take an unbiased approach to the data collected. Instead, as the researcher I acknowledge the preconceptions and reflect on how the subjectivity is part of this analysis process (Neubauer et al., 2019).

Procedures

Prior to beginning the research, a permission request was submitted to Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval to conduct the study. This ethical research will utilize three types of data collection which are 14 individual interviews, two focus-group interviews to establish triangulation of data, and collect any behavioral documents of students from teachers. Triangulation of data is drawing upon multiple data sources and methods to establish the validity and trustworthiness of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Rosadi et al., 2022). The step-by-step procedures for conducting the proposed study are covered below.

Permissions

Initially, securing approval from Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix A), the local school Board of Education (see Appendix B), and participants in the district of the setting for the study through informed consent (see Append C) was acquired in writing before any steps were made towards the research. To secure the local school Board of Education's approval, I had to go through several individuals to receive approval to conduct the study of the teachers in their school district. To conduct research on-site, the researcher sought and received approval from individuals in authority and conveyed to them that the research I was conducting will provide the least disruption to any activities at the site (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Recruitment Plan

Prior to the research, I sent a recruitment email to all high school teachers in the district (see Appendix D). As teachers, we are given an information sheet of all teachers' email addresses at the beginning of the year, this is how I obtained the email addresses for every teacher in the district. The participants were not deceived at any time about the research or the process of providing the data to the researcher (van Manen, 2017). The anonymity of the participants was protected; therefore, an informed consent form was submitted to each participant with the recruitment email as well as an explanation for the purpose of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Once participants returned their consent forms to indicate their interest in participating, I confirmed they met the study criteria. Participants were notified by phone, email, or in person once they were selected.

Data Collection Plan

In order to gain information concerning the factors that impact general education teachers' perceptions of students with EBDs in inclusive classroom settings, a variety of

collection methods were used for this qualitative phenomenological study. The methods and sequence of collecting data was initially individual face-to-face interviews, secondly focus group interviews involving 14 teachers as participants over a period of time (van Manen, 2017), and finally behavioral documents collected of students from teachers. I chose this sequence of collecting data because the face-to-face interview allowed me as the researcher to build rapport and comfort with the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Then, collecting documents built on an understanding of teacher experiences because it can provide insight on the students' behaviors and the teachers' discipline actions of the incidents. The focus group interviews assisted participants in realizing other aspects of the questions asked that were not thought about until another participant spoke (van Manen, 2017). When the interviewees were cooperative and friendly to one another, the interaction among them yielded the best information (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The face-to-face interview had a group of questions that were different from the focus group questions. However, each participant was asked the same questions in the face-to-face interviewing process. As with any effective interpretation, hermeneutics is a process, that is circular and involves scientific reasoning that requires the researcher to remove prejudices to listen to what the data is saying (van Manen, 2017).

Individual Interviews

The first step of data collection was individual interviews with each of my participants. A set of open-ended questions were asked of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2016) using a semi-structured interview guide. Open-ended questions are appropriate for qualitative research because the participants have an opportunity to give multiple worded answers that will generate a vast amount of information with potential follow-up questions (Creswell & Poth, 2016; van Manen, 2017). An interview guide allows the flexibility of asking follow-up questions while

ensuring multiple answers (Creswell & Poth, 2016; van Manen, 2017). Interviews were held in the Major School District at an agreed upon, safe, and neutral location that was suitable for the participant. There was a voice recorder and notes were taken on a notepad. Every word the participant said was recorded. Immediately after each interview, the recording was listened to for a reflection on the answers given by the researcher. Then I did listen to the recording again later to transcribe the interview and the notes taken during each interview. Member-checking strategies was conducted by asking the participants to review the individual interviews and focus group discussions that were transcribed to ensure accuracy, to enhance confidence in data interpretations. Member-checking is a technique for exploring the credibility of results (Sahakyan, 2023).

Individual Interview Questions

1. Can you please describe your educational background and your career path leading to your current teaching position? CRQ

2. Please describe the challenges in your inclusive classroom when working with students with EBDs. SQ1

3. How do you respond to problem behaviors from students with EBDs? SQ1

4. Please describe the antecedents to the disruptive behaviors of the students with EBDs? SQ1

5. How do you plan to manage future behavioral incidents in the classroom? SQ1

6. Please describe the behavioral interventions you use in response to disruptive behaviors. SQ1

7. Please describe the behavior of the students with EBDs when he or she is redirected in class in front of others compared to one-on-one redirection. SQ1

8. Please describe your relationship with the students with EBDs in your inclusive classroom. SQ2

9. Please describe your relationship with the general education students in your inclusive classroom. SQ2

10. Please describe your relationship with the co-teacher and/or paraprofessional in your inclusive classroom. SQ2

11. Please describe your relationship with the administration staff at your school. SQ2

12. Please describe your relationship with the parents/guardians of the students with EBDs. SQ2

13. When challenges arise in your inclusive classroom with students with EBDs, do you feel supported by the administration to discipline the student with the EBD the way you see fit? Why or why not? SQ3

14. Do you feel confident and well-prepared to instruct students with EBDs in the inclusive classroom? Why or why not? SQ3

15. What ideas would you like to share on how school districts could prepare teachers to instruct students with EBDs in the inclusive classroom? SQ3

16. What else would you like to add to your experiences with students with EBDs in your classroom? CRQ

The purpose of questions one through seven was to provide information concerning the challenges of teachers in the inclusive classroom. The responses to questions eight through 12 were to provide information concerning the relationship the teacher has with others in the inclusive classroom and outside the inclusive classroom environment. The response to questions

13 through 15 provided insight into the teachers' competence level in educating students with EBDs in the inclusive classroom setting.

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

The participants' answers were recorded and then transcribed to a computer. Each interview was transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy (Creswell & Poth, 2016). For further analysis, the data was organized into various categories and themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes. Coding is an important aspect of analyzing data, allowing the researcher to cross-reference the data into organized categories (Saldaña & Mallette, 2017; van Manen, 2017). The data analysis process did begin with open coding, then axial coding, and finally selective coding (Creswell & Poth, 2016; van Manen, 2017). Open coding consists of coding the data for its major categories based on the information (van Manen, 2017). An important aspect was to listen through the whole process several times until I could reconstruct the complete picture (Heinonen, 2015), making note of the essential themes as experienced by the interviewees (van Manen, 2017). I will used Saldaña's structural coding, which clusters comparably coded passages (Saldaña, 2013). I looked for a word that was descriptive of the context of the sentence. In order to differentiate between the categories and validate connections, axial coding was utilized. Axial coding is the process of relating codes to each other (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Saldaña & Mallette, 2017). Creswell & Poth (2016) noted the central steps of collecting data in reducing the data into meaningful segments and assigning names to the segments, combining codes into broader themes or categories, and utilizing data graphs, tables, and charts to compare and display the data. I used Excel as my qualitative data analysis software to code the data collected in this research.

Document Analysis Data Collection Approach

For this study, collecting documents of students from the participants involved discipline referrals, behavior contracts, students' behavioral intervention plan (BIP) which is a part of their IEP, students' supports page which is a part of their IEP (consists of classroom testing accommodations & modifications, instructional accommodations & modifications), call log to parent, and respond to intervention meeting information if it was available. The documents collected in this study were used to assist in triangulation. Reflective and descriptive notes were recorded from each document received from the participants with the date, place, and time of the behavior incident as the heading on the notepad (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The content area and lesson/activity being conducted at the time was recorded from the behavior documents as well, if recorded on the document (see Appendix E).

Document Analysis Data Analysis Plan

The teacher provided all documents that are available, pertaining to the students with emotional behavior disorders at the individual interview meeting with the interviewer. The steps for analyzing the behavior documents were similar to the steps used for the individual and focus-group interviews. First, I utilized open coding by treating all information as data for its major categories (Saldaña & Mallette, 2017). Then, I conducted axial coding by collecting data. This resulted in reducing the data into meaningful segments and assigning names to the segments (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Focus Groups

The focus group interview was advantageous as the interaction among participants likely brought the most in-depth answers (Creswell & Poth, 2016). There were two focus group interviews with seven participants in each group interview. A prior agreed-upon time and location was scheduled for both interviews. The interview was voice recorded and I took notes

during the interview. Immediately after the interview, I listened to the recording for a reflection on the answers given. Then again later, to record on the computer along with notes taken during the interview. The purpose of the focus group questions was to understand the personal experiences of each individual collectively and how their interrelationships bring about rich-thick information (Moustakas, 1994). The two focus-group interviews provided the opportunity for the interviewer to evaluate statements from each participant as they relay information to one another from their experiences (Fraser et al., 2020), which generated conversations and potentially, a greater amount of data than a definitive statement from a single participant could provide (Saldaña & Mallette, 2017).

Focus Group Questions

1. What does the term inclusive education mean to you? CRQ, SQ1, SQ3

2. What has been your personal experience in the inclusive classroom setting educating students with EBDs? CRQ, SQ1

3. What strategies can be used to improve your experience in the inclusive classroom setting? SQ1, SQ3

4. What barriers prevent successful inclusive practices? SQ1

5. What measures are school districts taking to overcome these barriers? SQ2, SQ3

6. How do you feel about the preparation programs that exist for teachers who teach students with EBDs? CRQ, SQ3

7. What preparation for educating students with EBD in inclusive settings did you lack and what tools or strategies have been helpful to overcome that lack? CRQ, SQ3

    SDT posits that environments or settings that provide autonomy support, competence support, and opportunities for relatedness are more likely to foster intrinsic motivation and

overall well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The purpose of question one was to discover the focus group participants' understanding of the term inclusive education and their experience with the phenomenon. The term inclusive education also means, the inclusion of students from diverse backgrounds and ethnicities, among other categories (Li et al., 2023). As teachers understand inclusive education for SWDs, there exists opportunities to learn from other educators teaching in the inclusive classroom (Webster & De Boer, 2021). The purpose of focus group question two spoke to the successful strategies implemented by teachers in the inclusive classroom and addressed the concern of research focus group question three. The purpose of focus group questions three through five was to offer insight into the development of educating students with EBDs in the inclusive setting. Teachers not adequately prepared to educate students with EBDs can be one of the barriers that exist in the inclusive classroom environment (Evashkovsky & Osipova, 2023). Questions six and seven aimed to understand the competence experiences of teachers instructing students with EBDs and how teacher preparation and/or professional development programs contributed to teachers' competence perceptions.

Focus Group Data Analysis Plan

To analyze the focus group data, the Saldaña method of first and second-order coding was conducted (Saldaña & Mallette, 2017). The steps for analyzing the focus group transcripts were similar to the steps used for the individual interviews. First, I utilized open coding by treating all information as data for its major categories (Saldaña & Mallette, 2017). Then, I conducted axial coding by collecting data. This will resulted in reducing the data into meaningful segments and assigning names to the segments (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Data Synthesis

Once all three sources of data were collected and individually analyzed, I synthesized my data. Selective coding was the final step and was utilized to connect all the categories from axial coding around one core category, which represented the central thesis of the research (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The purpose of selective coding was to define a new theory or modify an existing theory based on an individual's research (Talaee et al., 2023). The core category that is developed in selective coding came from elevating one of the categories from the axial coding stage or may be a new category that is drawn based on other categories (Talaee et al., 2023). As the phenomenological approach of this study was informed by the hermeneutic circle, the parts are understood in relation to the whole, and the whole gains meaning from its parts (van Manen, 2017). As the interpreter gains new insights, the understanding of a text or experience is not seen as fixed but is constantly evolving in the research process, to allow rich data to be generated (van Manen, 2017). I reflected on and interpreted the synthesized data to form a final composite description of how participants experienced the phenomenon of instructing students with EBDs in inclusive high school classrooms.

Trustworthiness

In this qualitative study, trustworthiness was established by addressing credibility, transferability, dependability, and comfortability (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The frameworks for ensuring rigor in the trustworthiness of qualitative research have been in existence for many years (Shenton, 2004). In particular, Guba's (1985) constructs have won considerable favor (Shenton, 2004). In this study, trustworthiness will be evident from the detailed descriptions of all stages, specifically individual interviews, focus-group interviews, and document collection.

Credibility

Credibility is the quality of being trusted and seeks to demonstrate the accuracy of the internal validity of the data (Shenton, 2004). The weight of evidence should become persuasive, in order to demonstrate credibility as the researcher looks for recurring factors. Moreover, contrary interpretations and disconfirming evidence must also be considered in confirming credibility (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The triangulation of data sources, investigators, and methods to establish credibility are proposed techniques in the field of trustworthiness in a study (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Rosadi et al., 2022). In this study, I will use individual interviews, focus group interviews, and collect documents to address credibility using triangulation. Triangulation of data is drawing upon multiple data sources and methods to establish validity and trustworthiness of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Rosadi et al., 2022). To enhance confidence in data interpretations, member-checking strategies will be conducted by asking the participants to review the individual interviews and focus group discussions that were transcribed to ensure accuracy. Member-checking is a technique for exploring the credibility of results (Sahakyan, 2023). Member-checking in qualitative research is one of the key instruments in ensuring data accuracy (Sahakyan, 2023). In addition, to ensure the questions will collect the needed information to understand the phenomenon of the study, credibility will be established through experts examining the interview questions. Peer debriefing will be conducted with a colleague, who will ask tough questions concerning the methods and interpretations of the data (Odo, 2016). Peer debriefing will occur after the data is analyzed by a peer, an education professor, who holds a Doctor of Education degree in Curriculum and Instruction. The educator will review my analysis of the data to ensure I present the data honestly.

Transferability

Transferability addresses the external validity of the data and is the means by which a study and its findings are able to transfer to other settings (Shenton, 2004). Transferability can only be made by the reader; the researcher can only create the conditions for transferability within the study (Creswell & Poth, 2016). As the researcher, I will provide detail for the context of the field work for the reader to decide whether the findings and environment are similar, to that which is familiar to the reader. Using a rich description of this study's setting in the Major School District, the 10-12 teacher as participants, and the students with EBDs to determine if the information can transfer to other situations (Shenton, 2004). The findings in a particular study that employs the same methods in a different environment could be of great value to the researcher (Moustakas, 1994). Maximum variation sampling will also be conducted in selecting participants, if there are more than the required number of participants initially selected (Benoot et al., 2016). To get to the desired number of participants, identifying key dimensions of variations will give me the opportunity to select a variation of the participants based on their age, gender, ethnicity, etc.

Dependability

Through an auditing of the research process, dependability is established (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Through interviews and focus groups, dependability involves determining how authentic the data is in the study. The dissertation committee and the Qualitative Research Director will audit the data from the beginning to the end to confirm dependability. An audit trail will be maintained by keeping accurate records of all documents of interviews, behavior documents from participants of students with emotional behavior disorders, and any other data used in an orderly manner. Audit trails are records of how research is conducted in a study (Mayo-Dosayla et al., 2022). The processes within a study should be reported in detail, in order

to address dependability, enabling someone in the future to gain the same results after repeating the work (Shenton, 2004).

Confirmability

Confirmability seeks to govern if the data is authentic to which the researcher admits their own predispositions (Shenton, 2004). Similar to dependability, confirmability is established through an audit of the research process (Moustakas, 1994). An audit trail will be conducted to ensure dependability for this study, which involves a qualified person examining the process and results. I will reduce the effect of investigator bias, emphasizing the role of triangulation in promoting confirmability (Shenton, 2004). With an emphasis on researcher reflexivity, the validation research will move toward the interpretive lens of qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2016). From the outset of the study, I will disclose the values, experiences, and biases that are brought to qualitative research. Therefore, the reader understands the position from which I take the inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2016). I will take notes during the interview and collect behavior documents. Reflexive journaling will take place during and after collecting data. The notes will be included as an appendix. The notes will be transcribed to a computer immediately after the interviews and the recording will be listened to for a reflection of the answers given.

Ethical Considerations

Before the interviewing process began, approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and individuals at the Board of Education was obtained (see Appendix A and Appendix B). A written permission form was submitted to each participant involved in the study (see Appendix C). Pseudonyms will be used to protect the confidentiality of participants and locations. The participants were notified that at any time they can withdraw from the study and that the study is voluntary. The interviews were conducted at a time that was convenient for the

researcher and participant, at an agreed upon safe neutral location that was suitable for the participant. The purpose of the study was explained to each participant. After the answers were transcribed, I had the participants review their answers and listen to the audio version of the interview to confirm all answers given. I discussed to the participant the length of time the data will be secured for three years. The data will be on an electronic file data storage with the password only known to me in a locked file cabinet in my home. However, any participant who withdraws from the study the data will be destroyed immediately. Ethical validation means that all research agendas must question their ethical and political implications as well as their underlying moral assumptions (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Summary

This qualitative study was seeking to describe the experiences of public high school teachers educating students with EBDs in inclusive classroom settings. A hermeneutic phenomenological study ass appropriate, in which data was collected from individuals who have experienced the phenomenon (van Manen, 2017). Individual interviews, focus-group interviews, and documentation collection were utilized in this study (van Manen, 2017). The data analysis process occurred through open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Creswell & Poth, 2016). To ensure the areas of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability were met through data triangulation, peer debriefing, and member-checking to establish the trustworthiness of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

This hermeneutic phenomenological studied the experiences of public high school teachers educating students with EBDs in inclusive classroom settings. This chapter begins with a discussion of the study's participants presented through demographic information followed by a brief history of educational experience for each interviewee. The participants' experiences concerning students with EBDs were both rewarding and challenging. Further, the chapter includes a discussion of the results of the data presented through themes, aligned with the research questions and the theoretical framework associated with the research question. A summary concludes the chapter.

Participants

A major criterion for choosing participants for a phenomenological study is that the individual has experienced the phenomenon being studied. Participants were selected using criterion sampling with maximum variation to select 14 participants who have experienced the study's central phenomenon. The 14 participants were placed in two focus groups of seven participants each. Six males and eight females were selected and agreed to participate in the phenomenological study. A recruitment letter was emailed to all high schools in the county to special education teachers who met the criteria of the study. The teachers were contacted by email and in person after being selected for the study.

Table 4

Teacher Participants

Teacher Participant	Years Taught	Highest Degree Earned	Content Area	Classroom Setting
Benny	20	Masters	Social Studies	Self-Contained
Harry	2	Undergraduate Degree	Special Education - All Content Areas	Inclusive
Beth	23	Masters	Literature	Self-Contained
Pam	24	Masters	Special Education - Math	Inclusive
Nancy	17	Masters	Special Education - All Content Areas	Inclusive
Troy	8	Masters	Special Education - Math	Inclusive
Gayle	3	Undergraduate Degree	Special Education - Literature	Inclusive
Robbie	20	Education Specialist	Special Education - All Content Areas	Inclusive
Preston	2	Undergraduate Degree	Special Education - Literature	Inclusive
Taylor	14	Undergraduate Degree	Special Education - Literature	Inclusive
Sara	21	Masters	Special Education - Science	Inclusive
Becky	7	Education Specialist	Special Education - Science	Inclusive
Wanda	14	Doctorate	Special Education - Literature	Inclusive
Hooper	14	Masters	Special Education - Science	Inclusive

Benny

Benny began attending a college in Alabama on a baseball scholarship. He only attended for a year, before leaving for another University. He did not immediately obtain his degree. So, he began his career in education as a paraprofessional. He entered the special education field because he wanted to know at a young age, why was his sister's behavior was different from others. When Benny became a paraprofessional, he was able to observe the learning experiences of different students in the classroom. In his ninth year in the field of special education, he received his certification. Benny has been in the field of education for 20 years. He received his master's degree two years ago from a University in Georgia. Benny's focus is getting to know the students individually because all come with different struggles. Some of his students with EBDs respond better when redirected in from others and some don't. So, he feels it's all about the individual student, instead of using similar strategies for all. Differentiating in the classroom at all times is Benny's focus in the self-contained classroom setting.

Harry

This is Harry's second year in the field of education. He was in corporate America prior to joining the teaching profession. He graduated from State College with a Marketing degree in Business. He began his career working in retail. He was a manager for three different stores prior to becoming a special education teacher. He eventually found his way to the educational field because he was getting tired of the fast pace of retail in today's economy. He is currently working to obtain his master's degree from Augusta University. Harry has learned that building a rapport with students is the key to students with EBDs complying to redirection much easier when needed in the classroom.

Beth

Beth is in her 23rd year of teaching in the field of special education. She is planning to retire from the educational field at the end of this school year. She obtained her undergraduate degree from a university in Georgia and her master's degree from a university in Alabama. She has been a self-contained teacher for 23 years in special education. She has taught numerous students with various exceptionalities in the self-contained classroom setting. Her most memorable years were teaching all students with EBDs in her self-contained classroom. She believes the school system has changed dramatically since she entered the educational field. This is why she plans to retire at the end of the school year. Beth feels the school administrators have given all the power to the parents and students with disabilities.

Pam

Pam began her career in the United States Army. In her first year, she was stationed in San Francisco. In 1997, she was deployed and returned from her deployment to attend a college in Georgia. Her major in college was Modern Language. She pursued her degree in education because she wanted to spend time with her children and the special education field was in need at the time. She began her career as a self-contained teacher. Now, she is teaching students with EBDs and other exceptionalities in the inclusive classroom setting. She has been teaching in the special education field for 24 years. Pam is a math teacher. Most of the outbursts from students with EBDs in her class come from the math material being taught in class. Math is a hard subject and can become frustrating for most students, especially for students with EBDs.

Nancy

Nancy received her business degree from a university in Georgia. She began her career in retail where she worked in various stores in the local mall for seven years. She has been teaching for 17 years. In the educational field, she began her career in the business department. She taught

students how to interview and obtain jobs once the students graduated from high school. She has been in the special education department for 12 years. She teaches students with disabilities in an inclusive classroom setting. During her first year in special education, she was able to teach her nephew. Later in her career, Nancy obtained her master's degree in leadership. In Nancy's inclusive classroom, students with EBDs prefer to work on their own without other students. Most of the disruptions involving students with EBDs in her class come from other students triggering their outbursts in class.

Troy

Troy graduated from a college in Georgia. He earned his undergraduate degree in Math and his master's degree in technology. He has been teaching co-taught math classes for eight years. He has been coaching football for eight years and lacrosse for four years in high school. He never thought he would be teaching students with EBDs when he entered the educational field. However, once he began teaching in this classroom environment, he did not want to teach in the general education setting. He has been asked multiple times to leave the co-taught classroom environment and move to the physical education department, but he refuses to leave the inclusive environment teaching students with disabilities. As time goes on, Troy has felt more comfortable in the inclusive classroom setting. Troy has found that one on one interaction is the key when situations arise involving students with EBDs. He feels that the less they are redirected in front of others the easier situations are handled.

Gayle

Gayle graduated from a university in the south with a degree in Literature. She has been in the school system for three years. She has been teaching in the co-taught classroom environment for two years. Gayle also teaches Sunday School at her church. When Gayle

decided to become a teacher in high school, she had no idea that she would be teaching students with various disabilities. The mental vision she had of her classroom at that time, was a classroom that looked more like a small auditorium, full of motivated students eager to hear everything she had prepared to teach for that day. Gayle explained that she was not prepared to educate students with various disabilities when she became a certified teacher. She does feel supported by the school administration; however, she feels the parents of students with EBDs are not as supportive to the teachers when it comes to disciplinary actions involving their child. She stated that parents are less likely to agree with the teacher when it comes to the student receiving consequences for inappropriate behavior in class.

Robbie

Robbie received her undergraduate degree in Special Education from a university in Georgia. She received her Master's and Specialist degrees from a college in the south. She has been teaching in the special education field for 20 years. She has taught in the self-contained and co-taught classroom during that time. Now, she has returned to the co-taught classroom teaching various subjects to high school students with and without disabilities. Robbie feels she works best educating students with EBDs. When she taught in the self-contained classroom, she was in the EBD classroom with six to eight students with EBDs. At times, she had two paraprofessionals accommodating and supporting the students in the EBD classroom. In the inclusive classroom, Robbie feels that communication and having a good rapport with students with EBDs is essential.

Preston

Preston graduated from a college in Northern Georgia. He earned his undergraduate degree in Communications. He is currently working to receive his master's degree. He is in his

second year of teaching Literature in the inclusive classroom. He is teaching at the same high school he graduated from six years ago. He is also a coach on the football team at the high school. He stated that he is finally feeling comfortable in the inclusive classroom educating students with EBDs. In his first year, he didn't feel the school district did enough to prepare him to teach students with disabilities. He would prefer more support from school administrators when discipling students with EBDs. He feels the school system is protecting students with disabilities more than they should, compared to general education students.

Taylor

Taylor is in his 14th year of teaching Literature in the school system. He began his college career at a university in Georgia but earned his undergraduate degree from a college in Florida in English. Taylor is currently attending a college in Virginia. He is in pursuit of his master's degree in divinity. He is currently working for his sixth principal, even though this is only the second high school he has worked at. This is his seventh-year teaching students in an inclusive classroom setting. This year Taylor is teaching only freshman and sophomore students in the inclusive classroom. This year, he has relied heavily on his special education teacher because of the numerous incidents concerning students with EBDs in the inclusive classroom setting.

Sara

Sara earned her undergraduate degree in Biology from a university in Georgia. She earned her master's degree from a university in Alabama. She has been in the educational system for 21 years. She began her career as a paraprofessional. She has taught in an inclusive classroom setting for 17 years. Sara's daughter is a middle school teacher who teaches English in the inclusive classroom in the same district. They both have multiple students with EBDs in their classrooms. Sara has worked in the general education setting for two years but prefers to work

with students with disabilities, specifically students with EBDs. Sara has challenges keeping students with EBDs engaged with content during their instructional classroom time.

Becky

Becky has taught Biology in high school for seven years. She graduated from a university in the state of Georgia with a degree in Biology. She also obtained her master's degree from the same University. She has taught in the general education classroom setting for five years. The past two years she has taught in the inclusive classroom setting. She relies heavily on the co-taught teachers in the inclusive classroom because she is not comfortable accommodating and supporting students with EBDs without support from the special education teachers. The challenges Becky has in her inclusive classroom setting is deescalating situations that involve students with EBDs. She allows the special education teacher in the classroom to discipline the students with EBDs most of the time because she still isn't comfortable disciplining the students with EBDs. When she does have to handle a situation involving a student with an EBD, she pulls that student into the hallway to speak with them one-on-one.

Wanda

Wanda obtained her doctorate degree online. She obtained her undergraduate degree in Literature from a college in Georgia. She is in her 14th year teaching Literature. Wanda has been teaching in an inclusive classroom for five years. Wanda is getting familiar teaching students with EBDs. Her challenges in the inclusive classroom are keeping students with EBDs engaged in the lesson at hand. When situations with students with EBDs arise in the classroom, she likes to invite them to a designated area for the student to cool down and a possible one on one talking session. Wanda also teaches Sunday School at a local church near her home. She has a student

with a disability in that classroom as well. The church has been blessed to have her in that role for the support she provides that child in Sunday School.

Hooper

Hooper is in his 14th year of teaching. He has spent five years teaching at the middle school level and has been teaching in high school for nine years. He graduated from a college in South Carolina with a degree in Biology. Hooper has been in the inclusive classroom for eight years. He relates well with students with EBDs in his classroom. He coaches golf and football at the high school. He likes to walk his students with EBDs to the football field once a week to give the students time to talk about the topics that interest them outside of school.

<div align="center">

Results

</div>

This study was guided by the following central question: What are the shared experiences of public high school teachers instructing students with emotional behavior disorders (EBDs) in inclusive classroom settings? To reach maximum variation, teachers with varying years of experiences were selected. I included the following supporting research questions to assist me in understanding the experiences of the participants: What challenges do high school teachers experience while instructing students with EBDs in inclusive classroom settings; What are the relatedness experiences of public high school teachers instructing students with EBDs in inclusive classroom settings; and, What are the competence experiences of public high school teachers instructing students with EBDs in inclusive classroom settings? After collecting data, it was unclear how many codes and themes would emerge. Throughout the individual and focus group interviews, certain concepts or ideas were recognized as similar among participants, which led to open coding. Through open coding, major categories of information were developed and examined. Axial coding was then applied, which connected categories to form possible themes.

The themes discovered in this study are as follows: (a) Teachers are Committed to Supporting Students, (b) Preparing Teachers for the Inclusive Classroom Setting, and (c) Support System for Teachers.

Table 5

Themes & Subthemes

Themes	Subthemes
Teachers are Committed to Supporting Students	One on One Interaction
	Building a Rapport
Preparing Teachers for the Inclusive Classroom Setting	Professional Development
	Teacher to Teacher Prep.
Support System for Teachers	Administration
	Co-taught Teacher

Teachers are Committed to Supporting Students

Teachers are committed to supporting students was the first theme that emerged in this phenomenological study. The key to having a successful experience in the inclusive classroom setting is understanding the importance of supporting students with EBDs. Supporting students with EBDs is a major factor to teachers in having a successful inclusive classroom. Ten of the 14 participants stated that supporting students with EBDs is a primary challenge in the inclusive environment. Taylor stated, "Differentiating in the classroom is a skill I'm working on to better support the students in my literature co-taught classes." This theme was prevalent in the focus

group interview with participants as well. In the first focus group interview, four of the seven

participants agreed that supporting students with EBDs was the determining factor for them not

giving in to the pressures of leaving the inclusive classroom to teach in a different learning

environment.

Benny, Harry, Beth, Nancy, Robbie, Becky, and Hooper were the participants in the first

focus group. Benny, Robbie, Beth, and Hooper felt they were well prepared to support students

with EBDs early in their careers as co-taught teachers. They did not want to leave the inclusive

classroom because they feared there would not be adequate teachers prepared to accommodate

and support the students with EBDs in their own schools. During the first focus group interview,

Robbie explained the difference between supporting students with EBDs in the self-contained

classroom setting compared to the inclusive classroom setting. She stated:

> The difference between supporting the students with EBDs in the self-contained setting is
>
> that we modify the assignments for our students with EBDs, compared to only
>
> accommodating the work for students with EBDs in the inclusive classroom setting.

When teachers accommodate assignments for students, the change in material is not as profound

as modifying the assignments for students. Both learning environments are supportive to the

students with EBDs; however, the change in learning material is different. The students in both

learning environments have similar exceptionalities. The different learning environments seem to

trigger different behaviors from students with EBDs, as well as different reactions from teachers

in the different learning environments. From analyzing the data in this study, in the self-

contained environment there seems to be more of a focus on behaviors, compared to the

inclusive environment. In the inclusive setting, more focus is on learning the content from the

curriculum than the students' behaviors. All participants felt that academic and behavioral support is needed in both learning environments.

The second focus group was less inclined to talk about behavioral support. All participants elaborated on academic support. Their focus is mainly keeping the students engaged in the content and differentiating in the classroom. The second focus group consisted of Pam, Troy, Gayle, Preston, Taylor, Sara, and Wanda. Wanda had the least number of behavioral issues from students with EBDs in her classroom. She stated, "I focus more on keeping students with EBDs engaged with the material being taught in the classroom, which gives the students less time to think about doing other things." Wanda explained to the group that she puts her students in groups in the classroom, with at least one student with an EBD or a disability in each group. Preston, Gayle, and Taylor differentiate instruction in their literature inclusive classroom as well, by placing students in groups in their classrooms. Preston said:

> I'm glad I was able to learn from an experienced educator like Wanda early in my career. By applying these supportive strategies in my co-taught classrooms, I have a lot less class disruptive horror stories than my colleagues at my school.

During the individual interviews, documents were collected from each participant individually. The documents collected were behavioral intervention plans (BIPs) and the student's supports page of the individualized education plan (IEP). The student's supports page consists of the student's academic accommodations and/or modifications. The documents collected were from a student on the participant's caseload. A few of the common classroom instructional testing accommodations and modifications of students were extended time, frequent monitored breaks, small group, and preferential seating. There was only one participant that had a student with an EBD that required directions and testing materials to be read to the student by

the teacher. The student also has a BIP; however, the teacher stated that the student is one of the nicest and well-behaved students in her inclusive classroom.

One on One Interaction

Participants' one-on-one interaction with the student was the first prevalent sub-theme that emerged during the individual and focus group interviews. The theme, teachers are committed to supporting students, is a direct correlation of teachers and students interacting one-on-one in the classroom. Data has shown in this study, students with EBDs are known to speak openly to teachers and be more susceptible to being redirected on a one-on-one basis compared to being around others in a classroom. During the individual interviews, ten of the 14 participants stated that they respond to problem behaviors from students with EBDs in the inclusive classroom setting by redirecting the student one-on-one, not in front of other students. Becky indicated, "One-on-one situation opposing to the whole group is how I redirect my students because students can make a big scene, especially students with EBDs. I just pull them in the hall if there is a problem."

Research has shown in this study that one-on-one redirection in the classroom with students with EBDs is more advantageous to the learning of the student and others in the classroom. Most participants noted that there are less disruptive outbursts when situations are handled one-on-one compared to the redirection of students with EBDs in front of other students. The participants discussed the number of discipline referrers from students with EBDs decreased, when the teacher became aware of handling the redirection of these students on an individual basis. Gayle stated, "I try to remove them from the group setting and speak to the student one-on-one. Speaking calmly to the student in the classroom. Trying to be more supportive."

During the first focus group interview, Hooper was the main participant that was more outspoken than others, when it came to interacting with students with EBDs. Hooper was a participant that learned how to educate students with various exceptionalities on the athletic field before entering the classroom environment. Hooper began his career in the educational field as an athletic coach in middle school. Hooper gained his experience teaching students with EBDs on the football field. He had to handle numerous behavioral situations with various students in the locker room and on the football field. He explained, "this experience was priceless because once I obtained my teaching certificate, I knew there was not a situation in the classroom that I could not handle."

There were 14 documents collected from the participants during the individual interviews. The participants submitted 14 BIPs and 14 student support pages from the students' IEPs. Nine of the 14 BIP documents collected, expounded on the need for the student to be spoken to individually during an outburst as a behavioral intervention, support, or strategy. Even though, the one-on-one interaction technique is a strategy for many students with EBDs that is documented in their IEPs, it was the major sub-theme to the theme in this phenomenological study. In the second focus-group interview, Pam explained to the other participants that she learned of the one-on-one technique in a class she took in college that specialized in strategies for supporting SWD in public schools. She stated:

> I am really familiar with the one-on-one interaction with students. As a math teacher, working with students individually is normal in my classroom. If there is a disruptive behavioral situation that needs to be handled in my classroom, it is not a big deal because the students with EBDs in my classroom react better when redirection is given individually.

Sara was a participant that did not prioritize handling disruptive situations one-one-one in her biology inclusive classrooms. In Sara's inclusive classrooms, the majority of the time she worked with general education students that had higher test scores than other students in the classroom. The co-taught teacher in the classroom worked mostly with students with EBDs. Sara had no particular strategy when handling disruptive behaviors in their inclusive classroom. She stated, "if any of my students are misbehaving or disruptive in my class, they understand that if they are going to get the teacher to student treatment, it is not going to be a nice conversation." One-on-one interaction with the student was a primary support strategy for Troy, Becky, and Preston. Troy stated, "Addressing problems before it gets blown out of proportion is important to build that rapport by talking to them one-on-one." One-on-one interaction with students with EBDs can help solve potential problems in and outside the school environment.

Building a Rapport

Teachers building a rapport with students with EBDs also emerged as a prevalent sub-theme of student supports. Building a rapport with students help self-manage the classroom environment because students with EBDs rely heavily on teacher-student relationships. Robbie stated, "I work to build a rapport with all of my students. But my students with EBDs share more information about their personal lives with me, than the general education students." Robbie, Benny, and Harry feel that building a rapport with students with EBDs is essential to reducing and managing any type of outbursts in the classroom by these students. Harry exclaimed, "building a rapport with my students makes a world of difference." In the first focus-group interview, Harry was more vocal when it came to building a rapport with the students. Harry was one of the participants that was taught early in his career that he should get to know the students in his classroom personally. He was taught this strategy in his first year of teaching, by his

former principal. Harry also stated, "Set the tone at the beginning in the classroom. Management skills. Gaining their respect means everything."

The teachers that communicate with students about their personal lives have more of a positive effect on their academic and behavioral progression in school. Benny, Hooper, Harry, Troy, Preston, and Robbie believed that building a rapport with students with EBDs meant more to the students' social progression than the other eight participants in this study. Robbie is the only teacher in this group of participants that does not coach a sport, that is confident in the strategy of building a rapport with students with EBDs. Hooper even stated during his individual interview that he walks his students to the football field on Fridays before the Friday night football games. Hooper said, "coaches seem to have a more profound relationship and positive influence on SWD, when the coach understands the exceptionalities of these students."

Building a rapport with students gives the teacher confidence in handling situations in class in front of other students that the teacher normally would only perform one-on-one with the student. The participants indicated that building a rapport with students can be time consuming for teachers. The participants that did not rely on building a rapport with students with EBDs felt that the number of students in their inclusive classroom setting made it difficult to commit so much time to only one or a few students when others need support also. During Becky's individual interview, she did not feel that building a rapport with students with EBDs made a difference in the student's progression academically or socially. She does not want to get too personal with the students with EBDs in her classroom. She prefers the co-taught teacher in the classroom to handle the personal issues with the students with EBDs, as well as any discipline referrals to the administrators' office.

During the first focus-group interview, the six participants felt that Becky needed to spend more time with SWD to understand the importance of building a rapport with students. Becky did admit to the group that she tends to spend more time with general education students because of the pressure from administrators to increase student test scores. During the second focus-group interview Pam, Gayle, and Sara admitted to the group that they thought less of building a rapport with students and more about the increasing pressures of meeting the district test score requirements for students. Troy explained to the group of participants that building a rapport with students with EBDs gives the students added incentives to perform better in the classrooms academically and behaviorally. Troy said,

> Every week I meet with my students with EBDs individually. I make sure they know I am aware of the personal situations in their lives because most of the time, they just want someone to listen. If they are engaged in the lesson during the class period, I make sure they are rewarded before the end of the week.

Preparing Teachers for the Inclusive Classroom Setting

Preparing teachers for the inclusive classroom setting was the second theme that emerged in this study. Successful general and special education teachers in the inclusive classroom setting recognize the importance of being trained to educate students with disabilities in order for these students to show progression in the inclusive classroom environment. Teachers that are not prepared to educate students with EBDs or other disabilities in a classroom setting can have negative long-term effects on those students. Teacher competency or a sense of pride could be established with the completion of a professional development program or a teacher-to-teacher seminar for training inexperienced teachers entering into the inclusive classroom setting. Hooper indicated:

Professional development seminars and workshops, where professionals or intervention specialist can train teachers, would have been very helpful to me. As a young teacher educating students with EBDs, I took many things that my students did or said to me personally.

In both focus-group interviews, all participants agreed that professional development programs or seminars would be helpful in preparing teachers to educate students with EBDs in the inclusive classroom environment. This type of preparation for teachers was unanimous among participants in this study. Six of the 14 participants in this study had some type of preparation training before entering the inclusive classroom. However, the teacher training that was given to these teachers was not geared toward preparing teachers for the inclusive classroom setting. All participants felt that their certification courses and training did not benefit them at all in preparation for educating students in the inclusive classroom environment. The participants expressed the need for professional development programs or teacher preparation seminars to be tailored to educating SWD in self-contained and inclusive classroom settings.

Some participants believed the teacher-to-teacher preparation seminars would be just as helpful, if not more helpful than the professional development programs. During their individual interviews Wanda, Gayle, and Preston felt that the experienced inclusive teachers could prepare teachers better than the programs because they could give them real-life situations that were occurring in the classrooms that a person could only learn through experience. The participants that attended college and obtained a degree in Education noted, that their college courses offered a solid foundation preparing teachers for the classroom but lacked the understating of educating students with various exceptionalities in the classroom environment. Taylor explained:

I don't feel well prepared because I have had no training in how to support these students. I'm learning on the fly. My courses in college did not prepare me for this type of classroom, this is why I rely heavily on my co-taught teacher in my class. She has been amazing in my growth and in my understanding of these students.

When students are scheduled to enter a classroom for the first time, teachers should be prepared to accommodate and support that student as needed. Participants expressed a need to receive adequate documentation on a student with an EBD or any other disability, before that student enters the inclusive classroom setting for the first time. Some teachers feel that a meeting about the student's academic and behavioral area of concern should be required before entering the classroom. Nancy expressed frustration from the lack of documentation given to the teachers of record in the inclusive classroom from the student's case manager. The BIPs and student's supports page from the student's IEP gives the teachers adequate documentation concerning the student's academic, developmental, and functional strengths or weaknesses. As well as information given to teachers concerning how a student's disability affects their involvement in the general education curriculum. This information for teachers is essential for the progression and success of the teacher and student with EBDs in the inclusive classroom setting. Nancy stated:

Meeting with their teachers in advance and what the student's routine is. It is better for both parties to get as much information as possible before the student arrives in my class. I need to understand how to best work with the students and apply strategies to help them.

Professional Development

Professional development was the first sub-theme that emerged from the theme of preparing teachers for the inclusive classroom setting. All of the participants demonstrated a strong desire for all pre-service general education teachers to be required to enroll in some type of professional development program or seminar. This requirement would prepare teachers in educating students with disabilities in an inclusive classroom setting, before the teacher enters into a classroom setting with students with disabilities. During the individual interview, a question to participants was asked concerning additional ideas they would like to share to prepare teachers to instruct students with EBDs in the inclusive classroom. Gayle explained:

We need proper training for strategies for supporting and accommodating these students. The beginning of the year during preplanning is the best time for some type of professional development program to take place. I wasn't prepared for the inclusive classroom. Having new teachers work with students with EBDs is troublesome. I only had one class introduction to special education. I would have liked to have had more, being a co-taught teacher in an inclusive classroom.

Preston stated, "My first year in the classroom, I did not know what I was getting into. I did not feel well-prepared but I was confident that I would be okay." During both focus-group interviews, professional development was a major topic of discussion early in the interviews. When questions were asked in the interviews, it seemed to always go back to the participants needing some type of training for the inclusive classroom. At times, many participants felt they were accommodating the students with EBDs by trial and error early in their career, especially when the co-taught teacher was not near them to assist. Troy indicated:

It seemed as if I was just there to put out fires in the classroom. I felt I was doing less

teaching and just reacting to issues in the classroom. I believe my experience coaching

football helped me relieve some of those anxiety issues in the classroom.

Teachers being well prepared before they enter the classroom is essential in their

confidence and the success of their students. When the participants indicated that their

confidence was low because of the lack of knowledge educating students with EBDs, the student

was the person that ultimately suffered. According to the student's IEP, there are specific goals

that are set for that particular student. There are goals that need to be tracked by the teacher in

the inclusive classroom for SWD. These goals need to be charted by the teachers in the

classroom to track the progression of the student. In the IEP the student has academic,

developmental, and functional needs that need to be addressed. The participants are aware that

this information has to be provided to the case manager. Robbie declared:

> I would be pulling my hair out, if I were a new teacher in this day and time. Only because
>
> of my experience am I keeping my head above water. We have to track goals for
>
> particular students in class, manage a variety of behaviors from students, and make sure
>
> assessment test scores meet the requirements of the state without proper preparation of
>
> how to get things done!

Nine of the 14 participants liked the concept of teachers attending a professional

development program that is specifically for teachers that educate SWD in the inclusive

classroom setting. The other participants would rather have an experienced educator mentor

them for a certain amount of time, after attending preparation sessions from those educators.

However, all participants agreed that a developmental program for inclusive teachers was well

overdue. Benny said, "I would have been open to having a professional development seminar at

least once every nine weeks, early in my career. That would have eliminated a lot of stressful nights."

Teacher to Teacher Preparation

The next sub-theme that emerged was teacher to teacher preparation. Participants acknowledged that pre-service teachers or teachers with one to two years of experience would greatly benefit from experienced teachers sharing strategies and techniques concerning inclusive classroom management. The general consensus is that this type of knowledge can only be gained from experienced teachers currently in an inclusive classroom setting. Wanda stated, "New teachers need to be taught from experienced teachers that have been in the inclusive setting. Physically showing scenarios on how to address behaviors and support our students with disabilities." Wanda, Gayle, and Preston were three of the participants that were adamant about experienced teachers training newly inclusive teachers in preparation of educating students with EBDs.

In the first focus-group session, the lack of in person classroom experience quickly triggered the emerging of the second sub-theme of teacher-to-teacher preparation. During some of the individual interviews, when I asked the participants about the challenges in the inclusive classroom, some of the teachers spoke of a lack of knowledge of the inclusive classroom as a major problem for them. Many of the participants had no knowledge of the level of discipline that would be needed in the inclusive classroom educating students with EBDs. Some of the teachers spoke of how it seemed that two students with EBDs in one classroom is equivalent to 10 general education students present in the same classroom. Preston said:

Students with EBDs are different from the other students with disabilities. I learned

quickly that they needed to be treated differently, after I sent my third student with an

EBD to the administrator's office with a discipline referral. I believe some of type

training would have helped me with those situations.

During the second focus-group interview, the participants noted that being able to learn

from other teachers would be invaluable information that a developmental program could not

give an inexperienced teacher. For instance, the first time the participants attended an IEP

meeting was a little overwhelming for some of them. Gayle stated:

I really did not know what to expect in my first IEP meeting. It really seemed like a

formal setting that was meant to interrogate the teachers. It just so happened that an

attorney was present and I was the student's general education teacher at the time. I had

only been a teacher for two and a half months at that time.

Gayle was one of the only participants to seriously consider leaving the inclusive classroom

setting and returning to the general education classroom environment, to solely educate general

education students. Her perception of the classroom environment before entering the educational

field was slightly different than she anticipated. Her lack of training in educating students with

EBDs dampened her enthusiasm of teaching overall. This could have been a case of a teacher

leaving the profession because of a lack of training. Instead, she received counseling from other

teachers helping her through the difficult times. Gayle shared, "I am fortunate to have a group of

colleagues that care about my well-being because my last two years have been tough. I still do

not know what the future holds for me."

Support System for Teachers

The third theme that appeared was the support system for teachers. All participants in the

study indicated that the support system for the teacher becomes a team of individuals that assists

in the progression of the student with EBDs academically, socially, and emotionally. During the

individual and focus-group interviews, the participants indicated that the support system for teachers refers to the administration, parents, paraprofessionals, and other teachers. This support system was determined by the participants of this study. The relatedness for teachers in the school environment helps in the overall development of the student with EBDs. Pam and Beth alluded to the main reason for them being in the school system for 20 or more years, is due to the relationships and the camaraderie they have developed with other teachers in their department and the administration. Pam asserted, "Since my first year in special education, I have felt love from my co-taught teachers and administration throughout the years. This has kept me going for all these years. I love them!"

In the individual interviews, the participants expressed that they respected their fellow colleagues and administrators at their schools. During these interviews, the topic of parents and paraprofessionals was talked about; however, the participants did not feel the parents nor paraprofessionals had an effect on their motivation to assist the students in their classroom, as much as administrators and other teachers. There were only four participants that had a consistent dialog with parents of students with EBDs. Two of these participants were teachers that taught students with EBDs in the self-contained classroom setting.

Preston was a teacher that did not think his relationship with his students with EBDs' parents was important. He stated, "I really have no relationship with their parents. My co-taught teacher meets with them. If a meeting is required to attend, I will be there." There were other participants that had similar feelings. Sara said:

I do not have much interaction with their parents. I have many students in my classroom with multiple classes to be concerned with. The board of education has put so much on

our plate, that it seems we do not have enough hours in the day to do what is needed.

However, I do communicate with them online, by Google Classroom.

Paraprofessionals were important to the participants and most of them had great relationships with the paraprofessionals in school. However, the teachers did not feel the paraprofessionals support was substantial enough to elaborate on. It was unanimous that their colleagues and administrators played a major part in their overall morale educating students with EBDs in the inclusive classroom setting. There were other reasons that caused their morale to decrease throughout their school day, such as an overload of paperwork, disruptive behaviors from students with EBDs, and the pressures from the school system to increase test scores. However, their relationships with their colleagues and support from their administrators were the topics that were discussed the most across all data collection sources when the teachers' support system was addressed.

Administration

Administration was the first sub-theme that emerged. Teachers agreed that having a supportive administrative staff is a major cause of successful learning for all students in the inclusive classroom setting. Being able to rely on support from administration, when it comes to disciplinary support with students with EBDs is vital to classroom success and teacher morale. Harry stated, "My relationship with administration is good. Once our administration understands that you are there for the student and whatever you do is to benefit the child they have your back." Other participants had similar feelings toward their own administrators in their school. However, there were other participants that garnered mixed feelings toward the administrators at their school. During the individual interview with Gayle, after I asked her about the relationship she has with administration. At first, she hesitated about answering the question. But after I

reassured her that this study was completely confidential. She stated, "My relationship with administration is okay but I want support when needed. At times, I do get discouraged because of the lack of consistency from them concerning student discipline."

Beth was the lone participant that did not have a good or even a cordial relationship with an administrator at her school, even though she does not feel the same way about all the administrators. When I asked Beth about her relationship with the current administration, she said, "It is contentious! Me and administration do not see eye to eye!" Throughout the years, Beth has had six different Principals at the current high school she works at. The last two to three years have been very challenging for Beth with the current administration at her school. Beth stated, "I do not feel support from this administration. They really don't discipline students the way I see fit and it seems they do not understand how to talk to the current teachers in the school." These are the main reasons Beth plans to retire at the end of this school year.

The participants all agreed that when administrators supported their overall teaching and management skills in the classroom, teachers gave more energy toward educating the students in the classroom and would do anything it took to make their administrators look good. This was a unanimous feeling from all participants in each focus-group interview. There were some participants that also felt, that if a teacher had to send a student to an administrator for a disruptive behavior issue and the administrator handled the situation the way the teacher felt was correct, this was a major step in the teacher supporting the administrator. Administrators that did not handle disruptive behavior situations correctly was a major topic of discussion during both focus-group interviews. There were participants that expressed a lack of consistency when it came to disciplining students with EBDs compared to other students. Pam said:

The relationship I have with them is complicated at times. It is a balance because I expect

them to discipline my students the way I see fit, when they act up in my class. When that

does not happen, it is a problem.

Even though Beth and Pam had similar statements concerning the way administration

disciplined their students, all of the participants felt that disciplining students with EBDs made a

big difference toward their relationship with administrators and gave them more confidence

educating students with EBDs in their inclusive classroom setting. Ten of the 14 participants had

good to great relationships with the administrators at their schools. Becky said, "Administration

has been very supportive. They are always willing to help." Nancy was another participant that

enjoyed working with the administrators at her school. She specified:

I feel we have a good relationship. I try to maintain the environment that is conducive for

the student with EBD in my classroom, so that I do not need my administrators involved

in disciplining my students. I handle things with the parent or their case manager, if there

is a discipline problem in my classroom.

Co-taught Teacher

The final sub-theme that developed was co-taught teacher. All participants in this study

agreed that the co-taught teacher in the inclusive classroom is just as responsible for student

growth and development, as the teacher of record in a particular classroom. Both teachers are

involved with lesson plans and the teaching of the curriculum among other classroom duties.

Sara enjoyed the business-like relationship with the students and the co-taught teacher in the

inclusive classroom. Sara specified:

We have a great relationship and this plays a huge role in the classroom teaching the

students. We are not best friends. It's a working relationship. It's similar to a business

partnership, understanding that we all are in this together to help the students. We try to not show any issues between teachers in front of the class. If there is a disagreement, we handle it behind closed doors. Then, we come back in the class on the same page and together showing our continuity.

All but one teacher had good to great relationships with their co-taught teacher. As stated before, Gayle did not envision her educational career teaching students that needed to be encouraged to complete simple assignments in class. She anticipated a totally different environment for her classroom. She anticipates returning to the general education setting next year, not because of her colleagues. Gayle feels, she would be better served in a classroom without a co-taught teacher. Gayle stated:

I do have a cordial relationship with my assistant... I'm sorry, my co-taught teacher. Our relationship began really rocky! But after consulting with a few of the teachers, it has gotten better. I just feel I'm better suited being alone in the classroom with my students. I do not mind having an assistant or a paraprofessional in my classroom to assist me but I want to do things my way.

Robbie was the other participant that had an up and down relationship with the co-taught teacher. She added:

It is up and down because the teachers are different. I try to just fit in and be adjustable. I am open to change to best help the student. Being approachable to the co-taught teacher is a start. Being consistent with our students is most important.

Sara has not always had a good relationship with the co-taught teacher in her inclusive classroom. She had to adjust to the inclusive classroom rules of having another teacher in the classroom. She stated:

Early in my teaching career, I did not enjoy the presence of another adult giving commands to my students in my classroom. Now, I do not think I would go back to being the only teacher in my classroom. It is so convenient having another teacher there covering items you may have missed. I've grown to build a positive relationship with them because it is two teachers, not just the teacher of record being there for the students with EBDs.

There is data collected from progress monitoring reports that are applied to the student's supports page in the IEP that indicate whether SWD can academically learn from the general education curriculum, without requiring modifications. These students are able to attend those classes in the inclusive classroom environment. If a student with an EBD is academically, behaviorally, and functionally able to attend classes in the general education setting from the general education curriculum, that student is able to take courses in the inclusive classroom setting with general education students. The student supports page is a document in the student's IEP that declares the classroom testing and instructional accommodations or modifications needed for the SWD.

The services page in the IEP declares the number of inclusive and self-contained classes the SWD is currently taking in school. Teachers rely on these documents to determine the particular placement for SWD in the self-contained or inclusive classroom setting. If a SWD needs support, to the point that their assignments need to be modified in order for that student to learn from the general curriculum. Then, that student would be placed in a self-contained setting in that particular subject. If their assignments need to be accommodated in a particular subject, then that student would be able to attend an inclusive classroom setting with general education students.

Research Question Responses

The following section offers concise answers to the research questions posed in this research study, primarily using the themes and subthemes developed in the previous section. The answers are reflective of the perception of the majority or in some cases all of the participants. All forms of data were considered when determining answers for all questions.

Central Research Question

What are the shared experiences of public high school teachers instructing students with emotional behavior disorders (EBDs) in inclusive classroom settings? The theme teachers are committed to supporting students with the sub-themes one-on-one interaction and building a rapport relate to the central research question. The participants expressed a feeling of love toward the students with EBDs in their classroom. Despite the various confrontations the teachers had throughout the year with these students. Almost all of the teachers had a feeling of parent to student relationship, instead of teacher to student relationship. There were multiple times, some of the participants addressed the students with EBDs as their babies. Robbie stated, "They are my babies! And they will always be my babies. Teachers cannot take the things they do in class personally!"

Based on the data collected, the participants' overall experiences of instructing students with EBDs in the inclusive classroom setting is challenging but very rewarding. The teachers feel that instructing these students is more than a job, it is a calling! Many of the participants alluded to numerous other jobs they could be doing that would grant them more finances than teaching; however, being able to change young students' lives is priceless to the teachers. Robbie stated that the teachers at her school formulated a club for SWD called, "the Buddy Club." They perform various tasks outside of school at different places. She stated, "The teachers in the club

spend numerous hours with the students outside of school, which allows the student-teacher relationship during school to really blossom to a wonderful relationship because they know we care and have their backs."

Sub-Question One

What challenges do high school teachers experience while instructing students with emotional behavior disorders (EBDs) in inclusive classroom settings? The theme preparing teachers for the inclusive classroom setting with the sub-themes professional development and teacher to teacher preparation relate to sub-question number one. Professional development and teacher seminars were the solutions to the participants' challenges in the inclusive classroom educating students with EBDs. Many of the participants were honest about the lack of knowledge they had educating students with EBDs, despite their educational background in higher education. Some were even embarrassed to express these thoughts to the interviewer. During the second focus-group interview, at the same time Preston and Gayle said, "I was not prepared!"

Based on the data collected, teachers listed student support and a lack of experience educating students with EBDs in the inclusive classroom as challenges they had to overcome. There was a consensus among participants that the inexperience of teachers was a major obstacle to supporting and accommodating students with EBDs. Their inexperience often caused the external behaviors of students with EBDs in the classroom among other students. Taylor stated, "The challenge is with me. I didn't know if I was adequately prepared to teach them daily because I would have to constantly remind myself to approach them differently."

Sub-Question Two

What are the relatedness experiences of public high school teachers instructing students with emotional behavior disorders (EBDs) in inclusive classroom settings? The theme support system for teachers with the sub-themes administration and co-taught teacher relate to sub-question number two. The participants agreed that the better the support from teachers and administration, the more motivated and energized they felt educating students with EBDs in their classroom. Beth declared:

> Support from others you work with goes a long way in your motivation in teaching students in your class. It should not be that way but it has a massive effect on how you teach in class. I have been teaching for many years and my best, most dynamic years in the classroom were when I enjoyed being around my colleagues and the administrators at school.

In the field of special education, being part of a team that is committed to supporting the SWD is essential in the progression of the student. What is often overlooked is the positive affect relatedness and a sense of community has on a teacher. Pam stated, "It's good having a positive relationship with the special education staff because we're friends before work. We talk about strategies all the time to help students. We all have the same goals to help all students."

Sub-Question Three

What are the competence experiences of public high school teachers instructing students with emotional behavior disorders (EBDs) in inclusive classroom settings? The theme preparing teachers for the inclusive classroom setting with the sub-themes professional development and teacher to teacher preparation relate to sub-question number three**.** Prior training in educating students with EBDs can often accelerate the professional competency usually gained through experience. All participants shared increasing confidence in their classroom management skills

educating students with EBDs, due to their experience of receiving the proper training through teacher development programs, which minimizes teacher abandonment. Beth stated, "Through my 23 years of experience I've gained confidence. I feel professional development is needed, especially for inexperienced teachers. There is always learning to gain in the field of education."

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of public high school teachers educating students with EBDs in inclusive classroom settings. This chapter first introduced the 14 participants of this study who teach in the inclusive classroom setting. Chapter four contained a description of each participant, the number of years they have been in the field of education, their highest degree earned, the content area they teach, and their classroom setting. The data, in the form of themes and sub-themes were presented. These themes were used to understand the experiences of teachers educating students with EBDs in the inclusive classroom setting. The first theme was teachers are committed to supporting students, which had the following subthemes: one on one interaction, building a rapport. The second theme was preparing teachers for the inclusive classroom setting, which had the following subthemes: professional development, teacher to teacher preparation. The third theme was support system for teachers, which had the following subthemes: administration, co-taught teacher. In addition, research question responses from participants were addressed and included. One important finding in this study was that all participants expressed a need for educational school systems to implement some type of professional development for teachers to understand how to manage and educate students with EBDs in an inclusive classroom environment.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of public high school teachers educating students with EBDs in inclusive classroom settings. This chapter begins with a discussion of the research findings by interpreting the themes and subthemes that appeared from data collection and analysis. Then, analysis and synthesis are discussed in relation to policy and practice. Next, this chapter includes theoretical and empirical implications, along with limitations and delimitations. Finally, Chapter Five concludes with recommendations for future research and a summary.

Discussion

The purpose of this section is to discuss a concise summary of this study's findings regarding the themes developed for this hermeneutic phenomenological study. In this study, the data was collected from 14 participants using individual interviews, focus group interviews, and document data collection. An abundance of findings demonstrated important topics for discussion, which are explained further based on existing literature and research analysis and discoveries.

Summary of Thematic Findings

My research focused on the experience of teachers educating students with EBDs in the inclusive classroom setting. The summaries of the thematic findings were developed from the themes in this study which include: (a) Teachers are Committed to Supporting Students, (b) Preparing Teachers for the Inclusive Classroom Setting, and (c) Support System for Teachers. The first theme, teachers are committed to supporting students included two subthemes: one on one interaction and building a rapport. Participants demonstrated a high level of importance in

supporting students with EBDs. One on one interaction and building a rapport were subthemes that were prevalent in the findings of supporting these students in the inclusive classroom setting. One on one interaction and building a rapport play a pivotal role in how teachers support students with EBDs. Participants who displayed autonomy in the inclusive classroom displayed a great desire to build a one-on-one relationship with their students.

Preparing teachers for the inclusive classroom setting was the second theme; it also had two subthemes: professional development and teacher to teacher preparation. The participants in this study showed repeated evidence of the need for teachers to have prior training of educating students with EBDs in an inclusive classroom setting, by verbally stating the need for some form of professional development or preparation program for preservice or first to second year teachers. During the individual and focus group interviews, all participants alluded to the emerging subthemes of professional development or teacher to teacher preparation as the key to teachers being prepared to manage an inclusive classroom of students with EBDs. Competency was more prevalent among the participants who had prior knowledge of educating students with EBDs in inclusive classroom settings.

The final theme was the support system for teachers. It also had two subthemes which were administration and co-taught teacher. The support system for teachers was an unexpected emerging theme that was identified in this study during the individual and focus group interviews. The participants stated that the assurance from administration was an underlying key to the success of teachers disciplining students with EBDs, which was mentioned as a dominant factor in managing students with EBDs in the inclusive classroom setting. The subtheme of co-taught teachers demonstrated the relatedness of teachers' success of working together in the

inclusive classroom, forming a family type atmosphere that encouraged teachers to continue in the field of education as a career.

Interpretation of Findings

Deci and Ryan's (2001) self-determination theory provided the theoretical framework for this phenomenological study. The three themes, as outlined in Chapter Four, emerged after analyzing the data collected from the participants through individual interviews, focus-group interviews, and the collection of documents. The discussion of thematic findings complements the findings in Chapter Two of the literature review of this study. The findings add to the understanding of the experiences of public high school teachers educating students with EBDs in inclusive classroom settings. The following subsections are the interpretation of findings: certification for all teachers, professional development seminars for teachers, and teacher support is a necessity.

Certification for All Teachers

The first interpretation for this study is certification for all teachers. The literature confirms that certification for general education teachers is a way to ensure that all educators will have the adequate training to educate all students in all classroom settings in the school environment. All of the participants in this phenomenological study are required to have their teaching certifications in order to teach general and special education students in the public school system. However, only special education teachers are required to have both their general and special education certifications in order to teach special education students. Benny and Beth, two of the participants in the self-contained classroom setting discussed these sentiments saying:

Many special education teachers do not like the fact that we are required to get a general education certificate to teach all students, but those teachers do not have to get our certificates to teach our students. I do not think that is fair.

It is noteworthy that the data collected in this study confirms a need for teacher certification in special education. There were 10 of the 14 participants that have had these conversations with other teachers in the past. The 12 participants that teach in the inclusive classroom setting stated that they have learned how to support students with EBDs mostly from their co-taught teacher, who had to obtain their certification in special education. These teachers would not have the need to learn how to support students with EBDs from their colleagues, if they were taught the strategies and tools of how to educate and support these students before entering the inclusive classroom environment.

Through a variety of models, two certified teachers have the opportunity to alter and adapt the delivery of co-teaching practice to students with EBDs (Jackson et al., 2017). Most of the participants in this study were in favor of the co-taught teacher classroom because of the task of educating students with EBDs and other exceptionalities in one educational classroom consisting of 20 to 30 students. Having a two teacher classroom staff can benefit the students in a classroom environment. However, there are some teachers that would rather educate their students individually. Teachers that prefer teaching alone in an inclusive classroom setting educating SWD have the opportunity to seek certification in the field of special education. Federal laws require teachers to have a certification in special education in order to educate SWD in a public-school setting (Koehler & Wild, 2019; Mathews et al., 2023).

The statements concerning teacher certifications arose, when the question of teachers feeling confident and well-prepared to instruct students with EBDs in the inclusive classroom

setting was addressed. Most of the participants liked the concept of being required to attend a professional development seminar or some type of teacher-to-teacher training for the inclusive classroom, as long as it was tailored to them teaching SWD specifically, instead of general education teachers being required to obtain another certification in order to educate SWD. All of the teachers understood the importance of having the knowledge and understanding of supporting and accommodating SWD; however, they did not feel the need to obtain an additional certification was necessary if they received the adequate training to support these students academically and behaviorally.

Since I have been in the special education field, there has always been an underlying tone of anger from special education teachers requesting that general education teachers be required to obtain a special education certificate to educate special education students, just as special education teachers are required to educate general education students. General education teachers being required to obtain certification in special education is a narrative that is ongoing. Having both cotaught teachers in the inclusive classroom mostly results in enhancing academic and behavioral performances which facilitates positive outcomes from students with EBDs, as it reduces behavioral incidents in the classroom (Garland & Dieker, 2019; Jackson et al., 2017).

Professional Development Seminars for Teachers

The second interpretation for this study is professional development seminars for teachers. A focal point expressed throughout this study involved the need for professional development for teachers educating students with EBDs, because of the students' vast accommodation and modification requirements in the inclusive classroom setting among other students. There were significant findings in this study that built on the narrative of the need for teachers to partake in professional development seminars to improve teacher competency and

minimize teacher abandonment. The participants in this study were aware of the negative effects that a lack of knowledge in educating SWD in the classroom had on their confidence, this is why professional development for teachers was a major topic in this study. The teachers in this study expressed that at the beginning of their career, it felt as if they were fast-tracked into the classroom without proper training of how to manage students with various exceptionalities and personalities in a classroom environment. As a result, the need for professional development for teachers was an obvious remedy to their inadequacies instructing SWD in the inclusive classroom setting.

The analysis of the data collected confirms providing opportunities for teachers to improve their knowledge of managing their classroom is the key for them to remain in the educational field and provides autonomous motivation. Having this knowledge increases their confidence in educating SWD, which leads to teachers feeling a sense of self-endorsement and volition in their actions. Preparing teachers for this type of classroom environment provides autonomy and competency. When the question was asked to the participants concerning ideas they would like to share on how their school district could better prepare teachers, 93% of the teachers expressed a need for some form of teacher training from other teachers or intervention specialists.

There were participants in this study who attended a professional development preparation program before entering the inclusive classroom environment. Benny indicated, "We need more seminars or professional development programs for teachers. And have intervention specialist or experienced teachers help the new teachers that have less experience with students with EBDs." There are teacher preparation programs that are designed for new teachers entering the educational field and teachers that have experience in the special education field. Some

school districts require regular professional learning for teachers to support education for the inclusion of SWD, since disabilities are complex, with changing thresholds and definitions for identification (Ahmed et al., 2022).

The participants that took professional development courses before entering the classroom environment expressed a great deal of confidence managing and educating students of all exceptionalities in their classroom setting. The participants that did not take these courses or seminars expressed that they felt rushed by the school system to meet district or state test score requirements without proper training of how to manage their classroom environment effectively. The participants were aware of the content material in their respective subjects; however, it was more to properly educating students than just knowing the content. The understanding of how to manage various exceptionalities in a classroom was the main task for these teachers before teaching any form of material to the students. Gayle and Preston had similar statements concerning their lack of training before entering the classroom environment. Both teachers are from the same high school, they teach the same subject, and entered the teaching profession only a year apart from one another. Gayle and Preston expressed a lack of training educating SWD and a lack of support from administration, at times. There are times during the month that they collaboratively plan their lessons with other teachers in the literature field of content at their school.

Teacher Support is a Necessity

The third interpretation for this study is teacher support is a necessity. In this study, the relationships and support of other teachers and administration emerged from the rich data collected during the individual and focus-group interviews. The participants in this study elaborated on the importance of teacher relationships with their colleagues and administrators.

The findings showed correlating factors of teacher effectiveness in the inclusive classroom setting and positive teacher relationships with colleagues and administrators. As school districts in the country pursue meeting the vast range of SWD needs (Pizana, 2022), the relationships teachers have with each other continues to rise in importance. During the individual interview with Taylor, he expressed his drive to become an administrator in the near future. Taylor's mentor is a principal in another district nearby. Taylor expressed that his mentor told him, "Once you become an administrator, look at the teachers in your school as if they are gold. Having an administrator that has your best interest at heart, goes a long way for teachers supporting you as an administrator."

The literature further includes that overwhelmingly, the participants associated their success in the classroom with the positive relationships they garnered with their support staff. The colleagues that collaborated with them educating students, daily lesson planning for students, and administrators that were supportive of their classroom management and teaching strategies were a few of the tasks the participants stated that made a difference to their morale. Negative relationships among teachers and administrators created unwarranted challenges for teachers during their time in a particular school (Evashkovsky & Osipova, 2023; Umemoto & Inagaki, 2023). Research has shown that over time, if a teacher did not have positive relationships with the support staff at their school, it was likely that the teacher would transfer to another school (Pizana, 2022). Throughout this study, teacher relationships with their support staff had a major influence on their autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The analysis of the data collected confirms the support from the participants colleagues and administration is a major cause of a teacher's success in the classroom. It was clear that

participants in this study felt that collaborating with other educators in the building produced a family like atmosphere that encourages comfortable and uncomfortable communication between staff that is needed in order to be a successful teacher, educating all students. Gayle and Preston were among the participants that spoke highly regarding teacher support in the classroom. Even though it involved spending extra time with your colleagues and administrators to develop this type of family atmosphere, all participants felt that it was definitely a necessity. Benny and Beth were among the most tenured participants in this study. Both teachers spent 20 plus years in the classroom educating SWD. They were adamant about the need for support from other teachers and administrators, which increases the success rate and longevity of teachers in the educational field, especially for teachers under three years of teaching experience.

In this study, I found that teachers' relatedness to others was vital to their success in the inclusive classroom. It did not matter if the obstacles were the students' behavior or academic issues in the classroom setting, the relationship with others increased their overall morale and their motivation to pull through circumstances. Without teacher support the participants expressed the lack of desire to remain in their current workplace and pursue other jobs in the educational field as well as other opportunities outside the teaching profession. In fact, Wanda left a previous school district over a perceived lack of support from administrators. She stated;

> The way they treated us was not ideal, to say the least. They did not care about our feelings, nor did they appreciate the time we spent in the classroom after school hours. They were more concerned with the assessment student test scores and however you managed to reach those goals was fine with them.

Implications for Policy and Practice

This phenomenological study revealed implications for policy and practice related to understanding the experiences of public high school teachers educating students with EBDs in inclusive classrooms. The implications for policy pertain to districts implementing efficient standards for teachers to meet, prior to entering the inclusive classroom setting. The implications for practice pertain to teachers' effectiveness educating students with EBDs in the inclusive classroom.

Implications for Policy

The implications for policy regarding findings and outcomes of this study are for district policies and regulations on teacher professional development and preparation programs. There is a gap in the literature pertaining to adequate training and development for general education teachers educating students with behavioral disabilities in the inclusive classroom setting. Research indicated that the need for teacher preparation programs may impact current educational policies and certifications for general education teachers. The data from the individual interviews, focus-group interviews, and the collection of documentation provided rich evidence to support the need for further study pertaining to applying state and district policies of teacher developmental preparation programs in educating students with EBDs in the inclusive classroom environment. The provision of resources and funding to support professional development for teachers should be guided by policy and law (Filderman et al., 2022). There is an array of academic and behavioral challenges that teachers of students with EBDs face, without proper current practices in professional development, which impacts both general and special educators (State et al., 2019).

According to the U.S. Department of Education, less than one percent of students are served in the category of emotional disturbance. However, the primary IDEA identification of

students with EBDs participated in 80% or more of a school day in the general education

classroom environment (Ahmed et al., 2022; Filderman et al., 2022; State et al., 2019), which

indicates a primary need for professional development for general and special education teachers

(Ahmed et al., 2022; Filderman et al., 2022; State et al., 2019). According to IDEA,

approximately 11% of students in the emotional disturbance category are not receiving services

at any point in school but may need them (Ahmed et al., 2022; State et al., 2019). As a result, a

significant number of students at risk for EBDs are likely to be present in classrooms, which

teachers must be prepared to accommodate and support these students (Ahmed et al., 2022; State

et al., 2019). Even more concerning, research shows that there are many practicing teachers that

are less credentialed to educate and support students under the emotional disturbance category

(State et al., 2019).

In the 1990s, a decade when changes in policy and practice marked significant changes in

assessment, standards, and evaluation of teachers were emerging significantly, the 2000s, (Healy

et al., 2020; State et al., 2019) marked a shift from soft policies to hard policies requiring states

to increase all around accountability in their schools for teachers and students (Ahmed et al.,

2022; Filderman et al., 2022; Healy et al., 2020; State et al., 2019). Therefore, Stanford

University and the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education adopted the

Performance Assessment for California Teachers to be used throughout the country (Ahmed et

al., 2022; Filderman et al., 2022; Healy et al., 2020; State et al., 2019). After this testing

assessment for teachers was implemented, it received praises from several studies contending

that teacher education programs improved (Ahmed et al., 2022; Filderman et al., 2022; Healy et

al., 2020; State et al., 2019). Furthermore, this assessment test for teachers was the first of its

kind to be used in the United States. Today, in some states it is required and others it is optional

but can be scored for teachers on the local level (Ahmed et al., 2022; Filderman et al., 2022; Healy et al., 2020; Matthew et al., 2022; State et al., 2019). School districts should plan for professional development programs for teachers specifically for educating and accommodating SWD in inclusive and self-contained classroom settings (Ahmed et al., 2022; Filderman et al., 2022), recognizing that it is imperative that teachers who educate SWD have these strategies and tools to support SWD in order for them to be successful in the classroom environment (Ahmed et al., 2022; Filderman et al., 2022).

Implications for Practice

The implication for practice regarding the findings and outcomes of this study are for public high school teachers' effectiveness educating students with EBDs in the inclusive classroom setting. While it is clear that professional development for teachers is an important finding in their development in educating students with EBDs in the inclusive environment, it may also be an effective tool for experienced general education teachers that only educate students in the general education classroom setting. The Deci and Ryan theory has been used to understand the core elements that influence behavior: autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Taylor explained:

> I do not always feel support from administration because I feel the administration is getting information from the school district to be more lenient with discipline on students, than in the past. They want students in school for their numbers, but this can have a negative effect on teachers' morale and their relationship with administrators, on down to other teachers in the building.

The data from the interviews revealed that the participants were not always prepared to support and accommodate students with EBDs in the inclusive classroom environment. The

school districts around the state showed that they do not require high school general education teachers to be certified to educate SWD in the inclusive classroom setting. The implication for practice that results from these findings is that the professional development or preparation programs for teachers should be part of the teachers' effectiveness and evaluation scores before entering in the inclusive classroom setting educating students with EBDs. In education, the primary goal is student learning. The primary goal for school districts should be preparing teachers to be qualified to support and accommodate all students in all classroom settings, from the first day of school.

Special education teachers are known to having the authority on adaptation and individualized expertise when it comes to educating SWD (Jackson et al., 2017; Webster & De Boer, 2021), while general education teachers are regularly described as content experts (Conroy et al., 2022; Crispel & Kasperski, 2021; Harbour et al., 2022). Combining the teachers' expertise to conceivably provide the general and special education students with quality instruction, differentiating content, and allowing greater responsiveness to the students' needs (Garland & Dieker, 2019; Jackson et al., 2017). Providing professional development for teachers could possibly generate these teaching qualities into one quality, certified educator (Jackson et al., 2017), capable of educating general and special education students in any educational classroom environment (Jackson et al., 2017; Webster & De Boer, 2021). The effectiveness of teacher professional development programs are continually evaluated for the goal of providing optimal teacher learning (Crispel & Kasperski, 2021; Jackson et al., 2017; Webster & De Boer, 2021). Teacher motivation and feeling competent in the classroom was found to be significant for the success of students in the classroom environment (Burgueño et al., 2022). Beth shared her sentiments:

Districts could offer a short training for all teachers and a more extensive training for

those that have students with EBDs in their class. Have separate meetings for the SWD in

the classroom. Have specific meetings for the student with EBDs, individually. Specific

things that may bother the student. Try to cover all bases for those things that we come

across daily in the self-contained and co-taught classroom.

Empirical and Theoretical Implications

The empirical and theoretical implications of this study are included in this section. The

empirical implications of this study assist in closing the empirical gap in the literature and

contribute to the body of literature pertaining to teacher professional developmental programs.

The theoretical implications of this study verify the theoretical framework of the study, Deci &

Ryan's (1980) SDT and revealed how the theory has been applied to understand the experiences

of public high school teachers educating students with EBDs in the inclusive classroom setting.

SDT was applied to this study to understand the autonomy, competence, and relatedness

experiences of teachers.

Empirical Implications

Empirically, this study extends the body of research of public high school teachers

educating students with EBDs in the inclusive classroom setting and provides implications for

future use of this study's method of examining their lived experiences (American Psychiatric

Association, 2022; Evashkovsky & Osipova, 2023; Mahabbati et al., 2022; McGuire & Meadan,

2022; Owens & Lo, 2022; Sanders et al., 2018; Umemoto & Inagaki, 2023; Van Mieghem et al.,

2022). Adding to the existing literature of understanding the experiences of teachers in the

inclusive classroom setting, this study aims to be empirically significant (Kielblock &

Woodcock, 2023). Deci & Ryan's (1980) SDT proposed that people were willing to perform

tasks at a high level, from an autonomous standpoint, if rewarded (Umemoto & Inagaki, 2023). Autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Sheldon & Prentice, 2019) are three needs identified that are essential for facilitating optimal functioning for constructive social development (Cho et al., 2023; Nukhu & Singh, 2023). In this study, these three psychological needs were vital in understanding the experiences of teachers educating students with EBDs.

This study contributed to closing the gap by focusing on the development and adequate training of public high school teachers educating students with behavioral disabilities in the inclusive classroom environment. The literature shows that there is a need for teacher development in preparation programs and how these programs have a potential to impact current educational policies and practices in the educational systems in our country (Ferreira et al., 2023; Harbour et al., 2022; Kielblock & Woodcock, 2023). The empirical literature further suggests that teachers' engagement with teacher preparation programs has become a widely used practice that has evidence of a positive increase in student achievement and teacher efficacy (Kielblock & Woodcock, 2023).

Theoretical Implications

Deci and Ryan's (1980) SDT also provided a theoretical framework for this study. SDT is a framework consisting of several perspectives in understanding many factors to explore educational phenomena linked to self-esteem, personality, motivation, and other constructs in the educational field (Cho et al., 2023; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000). This research provided insight into the many perspectives of the participants in understanding their intrinsic motivation, which is defined as the motivation to engage in certain activities because of the satisfaction rather than receiving a reward for a job well done (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The themes in this study (a) Teachers are Committed to Supporting Students, (b) Preparing Teachers for the

Inclusive Classroom Setting, and (c) Support System for Teachers relate well to Deci & Ryan's (1980) SDT. SDT has been used to understand the core elements that influence behavior: autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2000). These findings relate to and are built upon the theoretical framework of Deci & Ryan's (1980) self-determination theory (SDT) that framed the design for this study.

The data that emerged from the individual interviews, focus-group interviews, and the collection of documents was rich in evidence supporting Deci & Ryan's (1980) SDT of personality and human motivation that uses inner resources for personality development (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Sheldon & Prentice, 2019). Autonomy, competence, and relatedness are the three constructs that were used in this study to understand the teachers' experiences of educating students with EBDs in the inclusive classroom setting. Analyzing the motivational processes of teachers was essential in this study, given that motivation determines the initiation of an individual's behavior. The theory aims to provide the concepts for explaining all motivated behavior as well as the consequences for those behaviors, addressing momentary phenomenology, and cultural processes (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Furthermore, the theory is grounded in an organismic perspective acknowledging the struggle between the person and their interpersonal environment (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Sheldon & Prentice, 2019; Umemoto & Inagaki, 2023). SDT can serve as a foundation for the many disciplines and domains of personality psychology thus providing a lens through an array of human behavioral diversity and phenomena (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Sheldon & Prentice, 2019; Umemoto & Inagaki, 2023). The theory is also pragmatically pertinent, acknowledging the possibilities for human free will and the many impediments to such (Sheldon & Prentice, 2019).

As a result of theoretical implications, it is recommended that school districts offer teachers the opportunity to enroll in a teacher preparation program before entering the classroom environment, especially teachers that have the potential to educate students with EBDs in an inclusive classroom setting. Many school districts offer professional development seminars for teachers during a teacher's tenure in the classroom environment; however, there are no requirements for general education teachers to be certified in the area of completing a program or seminar before entering a classroom with students with EBDs. Moreover, during the teacher preparation programs, teachers can work with other educators in groups to familiarize themselves with collaborating with their colleagues, which would help teachers develop relationships and promote social integration among teachers. Finally, teachers that have been trained in the teacher preparation program can receive a certificate of completion, acknowledging their qualifications in educating students with EBDs in the inclusive classroom setting.

Limitations and Delimitations

This section includes the limitations and delimitations of this research. Limitations in this study include potential weaknesses of the study such as the setting of the study and participation of the participants. Acknowledging the limitations contributes to the trustworthiness of this study. Delimitations refer to the boundaries or constraints in this study to narrow the scope (Karimah & Hasegawa, 2022).

Limitations

This study included a few limitations. One limitation in this study was that all participants were high school teachers. The participants were public high school teachers with at least one year of experience. The teachers were carefully chosen to ensure they have all

experienced the phenomenon at the heart of the phenomenological design. Another limitation in the study was the limited timing to interview the participants. The sample pool of participants was from one school district. More time to interview a larger sample size of participants could have resulted in more insight that could have provided more experience to results or themes that were exposed from the data.

Delimitations

The delimitation in this study was the sample size of the participants. The boundary of the participants in this study were public high school teachers that educated SWD in the inclusive classroom setting. The teachers had to have at least one student in their inclusive classroom with an EBD. There were 14 participants in this study. Initially, the study began with 12 co-taught teachers as participants. A limitation is that only two special education teachers in the self-contained classroom were included. The two self-contained teachers gave a different perspective from the other participants of their experiences educating students with EBDs. All 14 participants gave rich data from the individual interviews, focus-group interviews, and the collection of documents to collect and analyze. Another delimitation in this study includes the choice to use a hermeneutic phenomenological design, which requires reflective interpretation of the study to achieve meaningful understanding.

Recommendations for Future Research

The recommendations for future research include the desired participants, the setting, and the design of this study. In addition to conducting a similar study that addresses several of the limitations related to sample size, region, or grades included, there are several recommendations for future research that build on this study's findings and interpretations. Future recommendations include how teachers can become better prepared to accommodate and support

students with EBDs in the inclusive classroom setting in order to close the gaps between students with EBDs and general education students, academically and behaviorally. Collectively, the participants expressed the need to be adequately trained with positive support from their staff, the role it played in their autonomy, competence, and relatedness was apparent. A grounded theory study that looks at the process of autonomy, relatedness, and competency development for teachers of students with EBDs would be appropriate. Utilizing the grounded theory methodology will add to the knowledge of assisting teachers in preparing to educate students with EBDs in the inclusive classroom setting, by receiving the adequate training prior to entering the classroom environment without being prepared. The grounded theory methodology provides an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon (Kelly et al., 2018; Sheldon & Prentice, 2019) and often determines what actually happens, linking the SDT of Deci & Ryan would be a valuable contribution to research.

The setting could also expand to the other states around the country. There could be an expansion to private or charter schools which educate SWD in their school setting. There does not have to be a grade or age limit of the SWD. The participants will be the teachers educating these students. The number of participants could be expanded to vastly more than 14, with this study being done quantitatively. There could be a link sent to special education teachers to complete an online survey. The survey could consist of questions related to their experiences in the inclusive classroom educating students with EBDs.

The study could even expand to paraprofessionals because of the time these individuals spend with SWD. The relationships SWD have with paraprofessionals in the schools is usually closer than the actual teacher of record in the special education classroom setting. Most paraprofessionals in the school district have some type of seminar they must complete in order to

assist teachers with SWD in the special education classroom. The literature in connection with the study's evidence of teachers supporting developmental preparation programs supports the need for further study in preparing teachers to educate students with EBDs in the inclusive classroom setting (Ahmed et al., 2022; Evashkovsky & Osipova, 2023; Webster & De Boer, 2021). Considering that most of the participants in this study did not have to complete a program or seminar to educate SWD in their inclusive classroom setting. Further studies could examine the contrast of experiences of the participants in their respective positions.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of public high school teachers educating students with EBDs in the inclusive classroom setting in the Major County School District. The themes were used to understand the experiences of teachers educating students with EBDs in the inclusive classroom setting. The first theme was teachers are committed to supporting students, which had the following subthemes: one on one interaction, building a rapport. The second theme was preparing teachers for the inclusive classroom setting, which had the following subthemes: professional development, teacher to teacher preparation. The third theme was support system for teachers, which had the following subthemes: administration, co-taught teacher. In addition, the interpretation of findings included: certification for all teachers, professional development seminars for teachers, and teacher support is a necessity. Beth concluded;

Having the opportunity to receive the in-depth training from the teacher developmental programs helped me immensely before entering the classroom my first-year teaching in the school system. I hope school systems in the state and around the country will see the

benefit of these programs in the future because it is definitely needful from what I have

been seeing from the lack of management in co-taught classroom environments today!

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Appendix A

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

September 20, 2023

Marvin Marshall
Kristy Motte

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY23-24-317 INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM SETTING FOR HIGH
SCHOOL STUDENTS WITH EMOTIONAL BEHAVIOR DISORDERS: A
PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF EDUCATORS' EXPERIENCES

Dear Marvin Marshall, Kristy Motte,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in
accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug
Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review.
This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your
approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in
which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive,
diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of
public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is
met:
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the
human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects,
and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

**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 can also be found on the same page under the
Attachments tab.**

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any
modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of
continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification
submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B

Consent

Title of the Project: Inclusive Classroom Setting for High School Students with Emotional Behavior Disorders: A Phenomenological Study of Educators' Experiences
Principal Investigator: Marvin Marshall, Doctoral Candidate, School of 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 Participants must be a general or special education teacher with at least one year experience educating emotional behavior disorder students in an inclusive classroom setting. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to describe the experiences of public high school teachers educating students with emotional behavior disorders in inclusive classroom settings.

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. First procedure (participate in an in-person, audio-recorded interview that will take approximately 30 minutes).
2. Second procedure (participate in a focus-group, audio-recorded interview with other participants that will take approximately 60 minutes).
3. Additional procedure is to provide behavioral documents of students with emotional behavior disorders at the time of the individual interview meeting.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include description of expected benefits to society. Society will benefit from this study by getting a better understanding of teachers' experiences in inclusive classroom settings instructing students with EBDs. Considering the different characteristics of students with special needs, one of the factors of inclusive education is to change the negative views teachers have, which is imperative for creating a comfortable learning environment in the inclusive classroom 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.

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 persons outside of the group.
- If data collected from you is reused or shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed beforehand.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer in a locked file cabinet. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted and all hardcopy records will be shredded.
- Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years. The researcher will have access to these recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Columbia County School District. 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 Marvin Marshall. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at ████████████ ████████████████. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Kristy Motte, at ████████████.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the 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 me as part of my participation in this study.

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

Appendix C

Recruitment Letter Email to Interviewee Participant

Dear Recipient:

As a student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to describe the experiences of public high school teachers educating students with emotional behavior disorders in inclusive classroom settings, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be a general or special education teacher with at least one year experience educating emotional behavior disorder students in an inclusive classroom setting. Participants, if willing, will be asked to attend a 30-minute individual interview and a 60-minute focus-group interview with other participants. Documents of students with emotional behavior disorders will be obtained at the individual interview meeting. Member-checking will be conducted by asking the participants to review the individual interviews and focus group discussions that were transcribed to ensure accuracy, which should take approximately 15 minutes. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but participant identities will not be disclosed.

To participate, please contact me at ███████████ or ███████████████████ for more information.

A consent document will be given to you at the time of the interview. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the interview. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the survey.

Sincerely,

Marvin Marshall
Researcher
██████████████████

Appendix D

Audit Trail

September 4, 2023, received site approval.

September 20, 2023, received Liberty University IRB approval for the study.

September 22, 2023, contacted all participants via email asking them to participate in the study.

September 29, 2023, sent invitations, consent forms, and questionnaires to candidates.

October 13, 2023, received all consent forms to conduct study.

October 17, 2023, conducted interview with Benny.

October 19, 2023, conducted interview with Harry.

October 19, 2023, conducted interview with Beth.

October 23, 2023, conducted interview with Pam.

October 24, 2023, conducted interview with Nancy.

October 26, 2023, conducted interview with Troy.

October, 30, 2023, Behavioral Intervention Plan and Modification documentation received.

November 1, 2023, conducted interview with Gayle.

November 3, 2023, conducted interview with Robbie.

November 3, 2023, conducted interview with Preston.

November 6, 2023, conducted interview with Taylor.

November 6, 2023, conducted interview with Sara.

November 9, 2023, conducted interview with Becky.

November 13, 2023, conducted interview with Wanda.

November 14, 2023, conducted interview with Hooper.

November 14, 2023, focus group conducted with Benny, Harry, Beth, Robbie, Nancy, Hooper, and Becky.

November 17, 2023, focus group conducted with Pam, Preston, Taylor, Sara, Gayle, Wanda, and Troy.