

PHYSICAL AGGRESSION AND SELF-INJURIOUS BEHAVIORS TOWARDS SELF OR
OTHERS BY NON-VERBAL/MINIMALLY VERBAL SECONDARY SPECIAL
EDUCATION STUDENTS WITH AUTISM IN A SELF-CONTAINED CLASSROOM: A
QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

by

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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 single intrinsic case study was to describe the experiences of using multiple forms of non-verbal interventions to decrease physical aggression and self-injurious behaviors for special education staff members in self-contained classrooms in Behaviorville ISD. The theory guiding this study was B. F. Skinner's theory on behaviorism. It explains how non-verbal interventions affect an individual's environment, how reinforcers influence their behaviors, and how all actions are interconnected. Participants were 10 people who are full-time employees of BISSD and have worked with or volunteered with non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with physical aggression, self-injurious behaviors, and autism spectrum disorder. Data collection methods were online surveys, individual interviews, and focus group discussions. Data analysis procedures included collecting, organizing, and reviewing the data, developing and assigning codes to the themes and patterns that develop, analyzing the coded data, and then reporting on the findings and implications of the data analysis. The findings indicated that by using multiple-forms of non-verbal interventions simultaneously, decreased crisis behaviors in NV/MV secondary special education students with ASD, whose target behaviors are physical aggression and SIB towards self and others in a self-contained classroom.

Keywords: autism, non-verbal/minimally verbal, physical aggression, self-injurious behaviors, special education self-contained classroom

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to God, my creator, from whom all good things flow!
And to my parents, who gave me moral lessons on discipline from an early age and taught me to always believe in myself. My family and friends, who always believed in my abilities to earn a doctorate; my children, who have truly been a huge blessing and tremendous help to me throughout this process; and my best friend, who has taught me to believe in my dreams, reach my goals, and never settle!

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	3
Copyright Page	4
Dedication	5
Acknowledgments	6
Table of Contents	7
List of Tables.....	14
List of Abbreviations.....	16
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	17
Overview.....	17
Background.....	17
Historical Context.....	18
Social Context.....	21
Theoretical Context.....	23
Problem Statement.....	24
Purpose Statement.....	25
Significance of the Study	26
Theoretical significance	26
Empirical Significance.....	27
Practical Significance.....	28
Research Questions.....	29
Central Research Question.....	29
Sub-Question One.....	29

Sub-Question Two	29
Definitions.....	30
Summary.....	31
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	33
Overview.....	33
Theoretical Framework.....	34
Related Literature.....	37
Behaviors	44
Physical Aggression.....	46
Self-injurious Behaviors	48
Autism.....	50
Social Skills	51
Communication.....	53
Safety	56
Student Safety	58
Staff Safety.....	59
Teacher Attrition.....	61
Educator Training	63
Interventions	64
Relationship Building	66
Facial Affect Recognition.....	68
Crisis Prevention Institute.....	71
Summary.....	76

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS	78
Overview	78
Research Design.....	78
Research Questions.....	81
Central Research Question.....	81
Settings and Participants	81
Setting	82
Participants.....	83
Researcher Positionality.....	84
Philosophical Assumptions.....	86
Ontological Assumption	86
Epistemological Assumption	87
Axiological Assumption	87
Researcher's Role	88
Procedures.....	89
Permissions	90
Recruitment Plan.....	91
Data Collection Plan	92
Survey	92
Individual Interviews	96
Focus Group Discussion	102
Data Synthesis.....	106
Trustworthiness.....	107

	10
Credibility	107
Dependability	109
Confirmability.....	109
Transferability.....	110
Ethical Considerations	110
Summary	112
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS	114
Overview.....	114
Participants.....	114
Participants Background.....	115
Jeremy.....	116
Lea	116
Wayne	117
Marie	117
Louise	117
Alberto.....	118
Jonee.....	118
Ron.....	118
Michael.....	119
Kay.....	119
Results.....	120
Theme 1: Communication Deficits between NV/MV Students and Staff	121

Sub-Theme 1 Non-Verbal Communication Approaches.....	123
Sub-Theme 2 Frustration.....	125
Sub-Theme 3 Patience.....	126
Sub-Theme 4 Consistency.....	126
Theme 2: Relationship Building is Paramount When Working with Students...	127
Sub-Theme 1 Our Students Deserve Better.....	130
Sub-Theme 2 Trust and Rapport.....	132
Sub-Theme 3 Confidence.....	132
Sub-Theme 4 Commitment.....	133
Theme 3: Safety First.....	134
Sub-Theme 1 Student and Staff Safety.....	138
Sub-Theme 2 Teamwork and CPI, as a Last Resort.....	140
Outlier Data and Findings.....	142
Outlier Finding #1 Parenting NV/MV Students with Behaviors at An Early Age.....	142
Research Question Responses.....	143
Central Research Question.....	144
Sub-Question One.....	145
Sub-Question Two	145
Summary	146
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION.....	148
Overview.....	148
Discussion.....	148

Summary of Thematic Findings.....	150
Interpretation of Findings	152
Interpretations for Communication Deficits.....	153
Interpretations for Relationship Building.....	155
Interpretations for Safety First.....	157
Implications for Policy and Practice	160
Implications for Policy School Districts.....	161
Implications for Practice Staff Members.....	163
Implications for Practice Families	164
Empirical and Theoretical Implications	165
Empirical Implications.....	166
Theoretical Implications.....	168
Limitations and Delimitations.....	169
Limitations.....	170
Delimitations.....	170
Recommendations for Future Research	170
Conclusion	172
Summary.....	172
References.....	174
Appendix A	214
Appendix B	215
Appendix C	216

Appendix D.....	221
Appendix E.....	222
Appendix F	225
Appendix G	226
Appendix H	227
Appendix I	228

List of Tables

Table 1. Open-Ended Survey Questions.....	94
Table 2. Open-Ended Interview Questions.....	96
Table 3. Open-Ended Focus Group Questions.....	102
Table 4. Participant Demographics.....	115
Table 5. Themes and Subthemes	121
Table 6. Coding Procedures	228

List of Figures

Figure 1. BISD by Participants.....	115
Figure 2. BISD by Education.....	115
Figure 3. S.E.E.C. Sped. Staff by Position.....	115
Figure 4. S.E.E.C. Sped. Staff by Years of Experience.....	115
Figure 5. S.E.E.C. Sped Staff by Grade Levels.....	115

List of Abbreviations

American Sign Language (ASL)

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Behavior Facilitator (BF)

Board Certified Behavior Analysis (BCBA)

Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI)

Facial Affect Recognition (FAR)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

Nonverbal and Minimally Verbal (NV/MV)

Other-Facial Expressions (OFE)

Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)

Self-Facial Expressions (SFE)

Structured Environment Enhance Communication (S.E.E.C.)

Self-Injurious Behaviors (SIB)

Teachers & Extraordinary Assistants Mentoring Students (T.E.A.M.S)

Thematic Analysis (TA)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The purpose of this single intrinsic case study was to describe the experiences of using multiple forms of non-verbal interventions to decrease physical aggression and self-injurious behaviors for special education staff members in self-contained classrooms in Behaviorville ISD. Two of the most challenging behaviors exhibited by individuals on the autism spectrum are self-injurious behavior (SIB) and aggression (Edelson, 2021). Children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are the fastest-growing segment of the school population (Kasari et al., 2021). The historical, social, and theoretical frameworks regarding physical aggression, SIB, in students with ASD will be outlined and assessed, highlighting the importance of the research problem and the purpose of the study. Significant factors are described through the lens of special education staff members that are correlated with the research questions and are identifiable and defined within the scope of this qualitative intrinsic single case study. Therefore, it was important to address the needed gap in the literature regarding NV/MV secondary special education students with ASD, who display physical aggression and SIBs. Few interventions exist for school-aged minimally verbal children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD); of those most focus on increasing language or decreasing behavioral problems, which are two areas of great need for many children with autism (Chang et al., 2017; 2018;).

Background

Historically, socially, and theoretically, physical aggression and self-injurious behaviors in NV/MV secondary students with autism have plagued institutions of learning for decades. The impact on educators and students interacting together socially in a safe and nurturing learning environment was paramount when building core relationships within specialized school

programs. Trying to understand the meaning of challenging behavior is made more complex when it is exhibited by people who have little to no verbal or written abilities (Simplican, 2019). The theory of behaviorism is what drove and motivated this proposed study as it enacts BF Skinner's beliefs in environmental changes and stimuli that help shape and control behaviors.

Historical Context

Although behaviorism tends to attribute behaviors that challenge the individual, challenging behavior is relational (Simplican, 2019). The historical aspects concerning the challenges of physical aggression and SIB in NV/MV secondary students with ASD has been a perplexing issue and one that has simply baffled special education staff members for years. Staff and support staff members who are mentally and socially-emotionally unprepared, under-trained, lack sufficient knowledge, or simply can't physically handle such larger secondary students when displaying assaultive and dangerous behaviors towards staff or self. The staff's inability to relate to such students plays a critical role in successfully changing students' behaviors.

The study herein contributed and added to the body of existing literature in special education regarding BF Skinner's theory of behaviorism and non-verbal interventions as they were first introduced to decrease and change unwanted and inappropriate behaviors and increase more desirable behaviors. Many past research studies have shown that young children with physical aggression, SIB, and ASD have not only tremendously impacted the child's early home and school environments; but these ongoing harmful and injurious acts of behavior have oftentimes continued to increase over time, contributing to other adulthood issues and concerns (Navarro et al., 2022).

While more rigorous epidemiological studies are needed, existing work suggests that SIB is a relatively common behavior disorder that occurs across the lifespan of individuals with ASD

(Dimian et al., 2017). Early incidents at school of acting-out behaviors would oftentimes be handled by teachers and administrators planning meetings with the family, the child's doctor, and other school personnel, counselors, licensed school psychologists, behavioral therapists, and the police department, along with other mental health representatives to discuss probable solutions that could effectively meet the needs of the student.

Historically, physical aggression and SIB in schools have been an age-old dilemma that has impacted and affected many educational institutes for years, causing irrefutable personal harm and safety, professionally impacting teacher burnout, and the loss of vital instructional time for the students. Thus, aggressive behaviors can interfere with instruction and progress in a variety of interventions, thereby hindering improvement across a range of developmental domains (Kanne, & Mazurek, 2010;2011;).

Many educators who were first-year teachers or who have never taught in specialized special education classrooms had no idea of how to safely and effectively handle or manage the enormous task and issues of ASD students' who demonstrated physical aggression, SIB, and other harmful acts directed towards staff, peers or self. Beginning teachers had a combined mobility and attrition rate that was 4% higher than teachers with more than three years of experience (Keigher, 2010). These and other developments have led to more specialized training, hands-on approaches, and interventions geared toward both student and staff safety. The serious outcomes associated with aggressive behavior highlight the importance of better understanding the scope of the problem among children and adolescents with ASD (Kanne, & Mazurek, 2010;2011;).

Autism is a neurodevelopment disorder that can affect social-emotional thinking and processing, social and life skills communication, and can cause a broad range of maladaptive,

physically aggressive, and self-injurious behaviors in children (Gitimoghaddam et al., 2022). Children with profound autism may be non-verbal/minimally verbal, have an intellectual disability (ID), and/or severely impaired adaptive functioning with significant requirements for support (National Council on Severe Autism, 2019). Physical violence at high schools against educators and peers from NV/MV students with autism (ASD) has historically been an issue in many special educational environments, including self-contained classrooms.

According to Martínez et al. (2021), the presence of conflictive, violent students increases the possibility of others supporting and developing disruptive behavior. Oftentimes for students who demonstrate these types of challenging behaviors, the implementation of specific interventions that are deemed successful and effective in these types of classroom environments were key in decreasing students' physical aggression and SIB towards self or others. Given Skinner's focus on environmental contributions to behavior, Skinner also advocated for cultural change to improve human welfare (Goddard, 2014).

With increased threats of physical harm or injury to staff, peers, or self in a specialized educational setting, violent acts are deemed as an unsafe and unpredictable detriment to the learning environment. Youths who are the object of aggression may become emotionally distressed by the physical and psychological violence they are subjected to, as well as social exclusion and rejection by other students, increasing the probability of depressive symptomatology, suicidal ideation, stress, anxiety, substance use, and psychological adjustment problems (McKinney et al., 2021). Therefore, describing special education staff members' individualized meanings regarding effective non-verbal interventions for NV/MV secondary students with ASD, physical aggression, and SIB could indeed deter such devastating occurrences from happening in the future for this unique and growing population of students.

Based on Skinner's theory of behaviorism, non-verbal interventions aid as reinforcers and consequences. Based on these consequences, those performances that are appropriate increase, becoming more frequent in the population or class of responses for the situation; at the same time, inappropriate forms of response decline or become extinct (Pierce & Cheney, 2013). In other words, adding to the idea of a functional definition, he took a pragmatic approach to specifying behavior, allowing the definition to be influenced by results (Baum, 2011).

Social Context

According to Simplican (2019), how should we think about the experiences of people with disabilities who injure others? Schools, homes, communities, and NV/MV secondary special education students has brought lots of social-emotional attention to the topic of physical aggression, SIB, and ASD. This phenomenon has reached many social, political, ethical, and legal heights due to all the intricate parts and variables that surround this topic. Behaviors that get labeled as challenging also vary, but self-injury and aggression toward others pose acute ethical dilemmas (Simplican, 2019).

The social significance has not only impacted the students and staff members but has overwhelmingly affected the parents, the school districts, and the educational communities at large. Many NV/MV secondary special education students with ASD who have demonstrated physical aggression or SIB towards themselves or others have been considered liabilities in public and private settings due to challenging and unpredictable behaviors. Communication deficits in language and speech for NV/MV children pose significant issues at school, at home, and out in the community where appropriate social-emotional behaviors are deemed necessary. A developmental disability significantly affects verbal and non-verbal communication and social interaction (O'Brien et al., 2020). For nearly 50 years, the field of applied behavior analysis has

provided a framework for the assessment and treatment of socially relevant behavior (Luiselli, 2021).

This phenomenon has greatly impacted and affected how special education teachers can instruct their students effectively and safely in the classroom setting using multiple forms of classroom management tools and resources for students with ASD. Furthermore, these individuals have difficulties in recognizing body language, making eye contact, understanding other people's emotions, and lack social or emotional reciprocity (Silva et al., 2021). These individual deficits, thus, limit staff members' abilities to effectively make positive changes to decrease challenging and crisis behaviors in specialized learning environments.

In the school environment, special educators must be prepared through specialized behavioral interventions and strategies to effectively communicate and interact with these challenging and crisis behavioral circumstances that affect and impact the overall social-emotional patterns of students. Emotional states are usually reflected in facial expressions (Silva et al., 2021). This oftentimes makes it difficult for some new and veteran staff members who aren't properly trained or knowledgeable of specific characteristics, traits, or interventions associated with ASD.

Interventions for children with limited communication skills or problem behavior require highly qualified professionals and are usually labor-intensive (Hu & Lee, 2019). Especially when teaching and communicating with autistic students, understanding their language or limited/language can be quite difficult for professionals. Expressing and reading facial expressions is an effective way of social interaction and communication (Silva et al., 2021). These non-verbal intervention tools are a needed resource in the development and growth to combat these critical target behaviors and bring positive change to the learning environment.

The overall welfare and well-being associated with physical aggression, self-injurious behaviors, and autism are well-known topics surrounding fair, equitable, and just rights for all students, particularly for students with disabilities and disorders. School districts on the city, state, and federal levels are fervently fighting the battle to enact, enforce, and implement more rules, regulations, and applicable laws geared toward providing the best possible services and support for students with autism who exhibit maladaptive behaviors, including physical aggression, and SIBs.

Accordingly, special education law in the United States requires local education agencies to provide positive behavior interventions and supports to students with disabilities whose behavior (e.g. self-stimulatory behavior, self-injury, aggression, property destruction, etc.) interferes with the educational progress of the learner or peers (Krezmien et al., 2017). These are critical areas of concern that have brought social attention to students with ASD, making it a socially significant issue in many school districts and the parents and communities that support them.

Theoretical Context

Utilizing BF Skinner's theory of behaviorism to expand upon and emphasize many social-emotional and behavioral issues that cause a change in the way and manner in which people behave will be applied to the theoretical framework. Mainstream experimental psychology's interest in the proximal causes of behavior and theory development is in stark contrast to the field of clinical psychology/psychotherapy, especially in applied behavior analysis, where radical behaviorism still dominates (Araiba, 2019; 2020;).

Other great historians like Watson, Thorndike, and Pavlov also revolutionized similar behavioral approaches and methodologies to control and change behaviors that are still being

highlighted and used in both regular and special education today for the development of students and adults with special needs. Special education is composed of a range of teaching practices specifically designed for the needs of individuals with disabilities who have special learning needs that well-trained special education teachers implement and are not typically seen or used by untrained teachers in a regular classroom (Francisco et al., 2020).

The theoretical philosophy surrounding this phenomenon was that many NV/MV secondary special education students with ASD still have to develop and mature social-emotional and behavioral needs that are not conceptually established due to their disability. Special Education includes all aspects of education for exceptional children, physical, mental, disadvantaged, and gifted children (Bolat, 2019). These are some of the ASD facts contributing to the continued theory of behaviorism surrounding student aggression and SIB. Skinners' beliefs regarding animal and human behaviors have forged the essential development and re-creation of the "radical" behaviorism theory that is associated with the proposed study and its effects on environmental changes that help shape, change, and control behaviors.

Problem Statement

The problem was that non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are increasingly demonstrating physical aggression and self-injurious behaviors (SIB) towards themselves or others in a self-contained classroom. Youths who develop in a violent setting show more stable aggressive traits and belief in the use of aggression (Mérida-López, 2021). These physically aggressive and dangerous behaviors have now significantly impacted and disrupted the way educators teach and prepare for their daily personal and professional roles as instructors in school districts. Physical aggression is

aggressive behavior in physical forms, such as hitting and kicking to hurt others (Saputra et al., 2021).

This research study was of vital importance as it examined and described in greater detail educators' perceptions of the effectiveness of using multiple forms of non-verbal interventions simultaneously that aided in decreasing or eliminating physically aggressive and SIB acts. Physical aggression and SIB affect us all. Aggressive behaviors observed in schools can also have negative emotional, psychological, and social effects in addition to directly observable effects such as physical wounding (Akman, 2021). Without special educators providing first-hand knowledge and key information regarding the effectiveness of non-verbal interventions used in this growing phenomenon, the world of special education may not be able to endure the future repercussions that put students' and staff's safety at risk in secondary self-contained classrooms of tomorrow. Teaching safe versus unsafe behaviors will be important and may require more time and repetition with clients with ASD (Peterson et al., 2019).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this single intrinsic case study was to describe the experiences of using multiple forms of non-verbal interventions to decrease physical aggression and self-injurious behaviors for special education staff members in self-contained classrooms in Behaviorville ISD. At this stage in the research, physical aggression and self-injurious behaviors (SIB) has been defined as hitting, kicking, biting, pinching, head-banging, hand-biting, or kneeing oneself or others.

Significance of the Study

The proposed study's theoretical, empirical, and practical contributions examined all the essential components that provided safety and security from a theoretical framework introduced by BF Skinner and his theory of behaviorism. Physical aggression and SIB in special education has impacted us all from past literary studies regarding safety and security in building positive teacher, student, parental, and community relationships by providing and implementing more effective and efficient interventions aimed at increasing overall student and staff safety. Learning should be an activity that is enjoyed and not feared.

Theoretical significance

This research study added to the theoretical values and insights of future literary works that looked through the lens of BF Skinner's theory of behaviorism to address the need for more effective "out-of-the-box" methodologies, strategies, and behavioral change models, like non-verbal interventions that can be implemented simultaneously and generalized successfully to decrease or change problem behaviors in educational, home, and other social settings. The unknowns of the solution can create anxiety for teachers (Hayes, 2014). Change and transition, especially when dealing with students, safety, behaviors, disabilities, and parents, is a slow-moving process that involves a lot of intricate parts and pieces to create progress. Transition is challenging due to the unknowns experienced with change (Hayes, 2014). However, the transition can also be worthwhile.

The theoretical significance of physical aggression, SIB, and ASD has been a problem that many historians, psychologists, educators, and behaviorists have been researching and studying for years. According to Simó-Pinatella et al. (2019) when considering different types of challenging behaviors (CBS), the most common behaviors assessed were aggression and self-

injury. Early studies on behaviorism by Thorndike, Pavlov, Watson, and Skinner have researched many studies, written relevant books, taught extensive classes, and also conducted numerous experiments regarding the positive effects and strategies of using non-verbal interventions on decreasing and increasing animal and later human behavior in society and educational settings, as well (Ziafar & Namaziandost, 2019).

According to Khaleel (2019), these strategies focus on addressing the challenges and behavioral problems teachers face when dealing with individuals with special needs and autism spectrum disorder in particular. The proposed research study looked to expand upon and added multifaceted approaches of behavioral change methodologies described through the lived experiences of special education staff members by effectively utilizing three non-verbal interventions simultaneously to reduce or eliminate physical aggression and SIB in NV/MV secondary students with ASD in a self-contained classroom.

Empirical Significance

As educators, it is paramount to understand how to best support students on the autism spectrum (Johnson & Gutierrez de Blume, 2021). Studies have shown past and current results of physical aggression and SIB and the outcomes that have affected not only the student and educator but also society as a whole. Many literary studies describe the impact and results associated with physical aggression and SIB and its far-reaching implications concerning safety and security and its potentially detrimental factors facing school districts, if not addressed in future research studies (Kupchik, 2016). Current research indicates that aggressive and destructive behaviors are related to multiple negative outcomes for children and adolescents with ASD, including impaired social skills, a lack of friends, elevated stress levels, reduced opportunities for education/therapy services, and a negative impact on family quality of life

(Fitzpatrick et al., 2017). This conduct can pose dangerous and harmful situations to students, educators, parents, and school districts now and in the future.

Often, adolescents who inflict violence on others do so because they are suffering or have suffered from abuse or early abandonment, or whose behavior is derived from living in a conflictive setting within the family, or where peers negatively influence their behavior (Mérida-López, 2021). This type of evidence was critical and relevant when working in self-contained classrooms where the students' target behaviors of concern are physical aggression and SIB.

Practical Significance

Although teachers are taught how to assess academic challenges of physical aggression and SIB, they are not equipped to systematically assess challenging behavior in their students (Young et al., 2018). The practical significance of the proposed research study was to further address gaps in the literature that significantly impacted school districts. This proposed study looked at how school districts implement positive interventions to ensure employee safety and security to protect their student and teacher populations. When the individual professional is to be recruited, characteristics such as attitude or interest, prior experiences, cognitive abilities, and learning styles will all have an impact (Wanna et al., 2021). Therefore, it was crucial to not only hire highly skilled and trained individuals but also individuals who have a heart for learning and understanding students with special needs and disabilities. Therefore, the study explored the qualities and attitudes of teaching professionals within school districts and how they are qualified to handle autistic students. According to Lanza (2020) exploring teachers' perceptions of student behavior and how these perceptions may influence their responses to those behaviors. Teachers' attitudes and perceptions may influence self-efficacy when managing student behavior; therefore, the study will be searching for the prevalence of, and contributions to, teachers'

feelings of burnout. The fact that teachers are academically and practically prepared for special needs education, this kind of preparation can also be useful for other non-special children (Sahan, 2021).

Research Questions

Students, teachers, and learning are the most valued and fundamental parts of our educational systems. However, there is a unique and intrinsic issue of grave concerns such as student and teacher safety, impeding the learning of others, or extenuating circumstances that cause our educational foundations and systems to falter due to such issues. It is then relevant to assess, describe, and implement successful tools, data, and resources as seen and described through the eyes of experts who have first-hand knowledge and lived experiences in remedying the situation by way of addressing these concerns regarding the research questions.

Central Research Question

What are special education staff members' experiences of using multiple forms of non-verbal interventions simultaneously to decrease physical aggression and self-injurious behaviors in self-contained classrooms?

Sub-Question One

Which non-verbal interventions do special education staff find most effective for non-verbal or minimally verbal students with ASD, physical aggression, and SIB in self-contained classrooms?

Sub-Question Two

How prepared do secondary special education staff members feel they are at utilizing non-verbal interventions in the self-contained classroom?

Definitions

1. *Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)* - is a lifelong neurodevelopmental disorder associated with deficits in communicative and social interactions, as well as restrictive and stereotyped behaviors (DSM-5 American Psychiatric Association. Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 2013).
2. *Physical Aggression* - Physical aggression is aggression that involves harming others physically—for instance hitting, or kicking. Aggressive behaviors - include actions that harm others, such as assault, bullying, hitting, etc. (Colcord et al., 2016).
3. *Self-injurious behaviors (SIB)* - The most common forms of these behaviors include head-banging, hand-biting, kicking, or kneeling oneself, and excessive self-rubbing and scratching. Children and adults with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are at high risk of developing self-injurious behaviors (SIB) and other problem behaviors (Gulsrud et al., 2018).
4. *Nonverbal and Minimally verbal (NV/MV)* - NV is defined as having no functional speech. MV is defined (e.g., the presence of words, phonetically consistent forms, spoken words versus gestures, receptive language level, and sound imitation) (Koegel et al., 2020).
5. *Teacher/Student Relationship* - It is a relationship that emphasizes constructive guidance sustained by praise rather than persistent criticism (Marzano et al., 2003).
6. *Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI)* - is an international training organization that specializes in the safe management of disruptive and assaultive behavior. CPI training provides the de-escalation techniques and behavior management strategies you need to create a culture of safety (Crisis Prevention Institute, n.d.).

7. *Facial Affect Recognition (FAR)* - Facial recognition is the process of identifying or verifying the identity of a person using their face. It captures, analyzes, and compares patterns based on the person's facial details (Bordon et al., 2017).

Summary

The major problem was that many of our NV/MV secondary special education students with ASD are increasingly demonstrating more and more physical aggression and SIB in self-contained classrooms in Behaviorville ISD located in North Texas. The prevalence of self-injurious behavior (SIB) is as high as 50% among children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) (Dimian et al., 2017). Children with profound autism may be non-verbal/minimally verbal, have an intellectual disability (ID), and/or severely impaired adaptive functioning with significant requirements for support (National Council on Severe Autism, 2019). It was, therefore, imperative that continued research in the areas of physical aggression and SIB in NV/MV secondary special education students with ASD bridge the literary gap as continued research is needed to combat such challenging and crisis behaviors.

The purpose of this case study was to describe special education staff members' perceptions of the effectiveness of using multiple forms of non-verbal interventions simultaneously to decrease or eliminate physical aggression, SIB, by NV/MV secondary special education students with ASD in self-contained classrooms in Behaviorville ISD located in North Texas. This single intrinsic case study advanced and provided further knowledge and insights into the field of special education concerning physical aggression, SIB, in secondary students with ASD. Taken together, this research suggests that ASD and ADHD characteristics confer a heightened risk for the presence and persistence of self-injurious and aggressive behavior (Crawford et al., 2019). Therefore, this research was of vital importance when helping to identify

and describe multiple effective forms of non-verbal interventions through the lived experiences and lenses of special education staff members.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Ambitious and unique NV/MV secondary students with ASD and strong and knowledgeable special education leaders have always been a part of the American framework in educational settings for centuries. Recently, there has been rise to another type of phenomenon that has taken the country and special education by storm. A substantial proportion of autistic individuals exhibit aggressive behaviors and/or SIB (Northrup et al., 2022). Estimates for the prevalence of these behaviors in autistic individuals vary widely across studies but fall somewhere between 30 and 50% for self-injurious behaviors (SIB; Steinfeldt-Kristensen et al., 2020), and between 10 and 58% for physical aggression toward others (Mazurek, 2020), with variability likely due to differences in sample characteristics and definitions of aggression. These growing statistical numbers have even the most skilled of special educators on edge. Beginners and seasoned educators find addressing challenging student behaviors is time-consuming and leaves less time for academics (Lewis et al., 2017). Physical aggression and self-injurious behaviors by non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with autism has become increasingly more prevalent with the increased number of students that are showing up in today's self-contained classrooms and school districts across the country. Additional research was needed. Therefore, the added need for effective interventions for this unique population of students was critical. When a bit of behavior has the kind of consequences called reinforcing, it is more likely to occur again (Skinner, 1976).

Theoretical Framework

Violence against teachers at school is an issue with ramifications for societies all over the world, but it remains an under-researched phenomenon (De Cordova et al., 2019). This kind of challenging behavior could be disruptive and destructive to ASD individuals themselves or others (McGinnis et al. 2019). Approximately, 30% of children with autism are non-verbal or minimally verbal (Tager-Flusberg & Kasari, 2013) and 33% have an ID (Maenner et al., 2020).

The proposed research study and focus of inquiry established within the theoretical framework identifying Burrhus Frederic Skinner (considered the father of behaviorism) and his theory of behaviorism. The origination of B.F. Skinner's early theories on behaviorism originated through his beginning years of learning and studying other great behaviorists, psychologists, and philosophers like Pavlov and Thorndike. In regards to BF Skinners' theory of behaviorism, and the teaching of non-verbal interventions, other research studies have touched upon their successes and failures regarding NV/MV secondary special education students with ASD. Although challenges in social communication are central to a diagnosis of ASD, children's strengths and needs vary substantially, and therefore, it is unlikely that a single intervention will be effective for all children (Kasari et al., 2021).

As autism is a heterogeneous condition it is unlikely that one style of intervention will address all individuals, nor all aspects of its symptomatology within each individual (McKinney et al., 2020). According to Kasari et al., (2021) although there are multiple types of interventions—and at multiple levels (e.g., school, classroom, individual) of intervention—to support children's social skills, few have been tested alone or in combination with other interventions when applied in authentic and inclusive school contexts. According to Sari et al.,

(2023) children with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) experience difficulty in developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships.

Through this, professors establish optimal relationships and promote a positive climate, which has a pleasant impact on interest, effective learning, and the feeling of cohesion and belonging to a group (Puertas-Molero et al., 2022). Achieving significant positive changes can be a challenging accomplishment to achieve while working with NV/MV secondary special education children with physical aggression, SIB, and ASD due to the harmful extenuating circumstances of ASD's underlying condition and diagnosis. Although the etiology is different, these behavioral challenges can impede social, behavioral, and academic progress for both students with EBD and ASD (Hutchins et al., 2020). Gitimoghaddam et al. (2022) applied the BF Skinner theory of behaviorism to study outcomes of applied behavior analysis when working with children with autism. The study focused on developmental areas such as cognitive, language, social/communication, and quality of life, among others.

Behaviorism is a complex of methodological, epistemological, and sometimes ontological assumptions about the foundations of psychology (Braat et al., 2020). When using multiple forms of non-verbal interventions simultaneously students and staff can benefit greatly due to positive factors such as cost efficiency, ease of implementation, flexibility offered, generalization to other settings, dependability of use, and other positive contributing factors that are relevant to overall school success.

1. The cost was free other than providing staff training. There is a need for therapies that address underserved subpopulations of autism and can be delivered with ease at a low cost (McKinney et al., 2020).

2. They're discreet and non-evasive. Non-verbal behaviors generally include teachers' eye contact, facial expressions, voice variations, and hand gestures, etc. (Peng et al., 2022).
3. They're sustainable and can be generalized in multiple settings. Application of systems to address behavior on a schoolwide level could simplify training, increase staffing flexibility, and decrease the use of crisis response procedures (Minkos et al., 2023).

Just like special education students with ASD aren't a one-size-fits-all criteria, interventions shouldn't be a one-size-fits-all either. Although multiple types of social skills interventions have been tested, we lack needed evidence to support a specific combination or sequence of the application of these environmental and individual-level interventions as well as how to tailor such sequences to the specific needs of classrooms or the children with ASD within classrooms (Kasari et al., 2021). Behavior modification approaches to speech and sign language training are two primary methods crucial in managing communication defects in ASD (Eltyeb et al., 2023).

According to Sari et al., (2023) children with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) experience difficulty in developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships. Therefore, providing educators with additional tools and philosophies that are proven successful and safe in the learning environment, and implementing multiple forms of non-verbal interventions simultaneously in specialized learning environments provided vital knowledge and understanding for future research regarding student and staff well-being and school safety. Behaviorism is not the science of human behavior; it is the philosophy of that science (Skinner, 1976).

Related Literature

Special education, in and of itself, is for highly skilled and trained staff members with an area of expertise aimed at serving students with disabilities like ASD; but when these students have crisis behavioral issues that are detrimental to the learning environment, then these obstacles are hard to overcome for both students and staff. Two of the most challenging behaviors exhibited by individuals on the autism spectrum are self-injurious behavior (SIB) and aggression (Edelson, 2021). Thus, there is a need to understand how best to combine, sequence, and individualize social skills interventions to meet the heterogeneous needs of these children (Kasari et al., 2021). Educator knowledge, experience, and perceptions of working with this unique population of students are limited. Special education schoolteachers' perception of ASD and the way of communication that they use with the affected children is crucial (Eltyeb et al., 2023). The most extreme portion of the spectrum involved little to no language, nonverbal communication, and frequent occurrences of violent and self-harming behavior. A substantial proportion of autistic individuals exhibit aggressive behaviors and/or SIB (Northrup et al., 2022). Attention and study were needed to fill up the gaps in our knowledge of how to address these situations, particularly in settings where education takes place in schools, classrooms, and communities.

According to McKinney et al., (2021) They note challenging behavior as one of the main hurdles and suggest solutions such as redirecting the child's attention, changing the activity, offering a short break or ignoring outbursts. It was therefore vital to educate and broaden special education staff members' knowledge on using multiple forms of effective non-verbal interventions simultaneously to decrease physical aggression and self-injurious behaviors towards self or others by non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with

autism in a self-contained classroom. Estimates for the prevalence of these behaviors in autistic individuals vary widely across studies but fall somewhere between 30 and 50% for self-injurious behaviors (SIB; Steinfeldt-Kristensen et al., 2020), and between 10 and 58% for physical aggression toward others (Mazurek, 2020), with variability likely due to differences in sample characteristics and definitions of aggression. One of the most harmful behaviors demonstrated by individuals with developmental impairments is self-injurious conduct (National Council on Severe Autism, 2019).

The realization is that many teachers are unprepared and have limited education and training in this area of expertise to deal effectively with the harmful effects caused due to the physical aggression and SIB by NV/MV secondary special education students in self-contained classrooms (Florian & Camedda, 2020). These factors have included: the presence of autism (Mazurek et al., 2013; Nicholls et al., 2020), lower levels of adaptive skills (Nicholls et al., 2020), lower levels of communication skills (Kiernan & Kiernan, 1994), severity of intellectual disability (Murphy et al., 2009), and deprivation experienced by the child's family (Nicholls et al., 2020).

In addition, while aggression and SIB are distinct behaviors, they appear to be strongly associated with one another (Northrup et al., 2022). Violence in schools against teachers and students impacts student learning and engagement. According to Edelson (2021), SIB often leads to some form of tissue damage, such as redness, bruises, lacerations, and, in severe cases, bone fractures. Examples include ear hitting, hand biting, hair pulling, head banging, and excessive rubbing and scratching. These and other harmful and dangerous acts not only affect the entire classroom environment but also impact teacher attrition. The challenging behaviors of children

with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) have been widely described as one of the most significant sources of stress for teachers (Simó-Pinatella et al., 2023).

Physical violence and SIB are more likely in nonverbal/minimally verbal secondary particular education adolescents with ASD who also have ID and impaired adaptive functioning (Soke et al., 2016). SIB affects 50% of ASD children (Dimian et al., 2017). These incidents of aggression and SIB described as harmful and detrimental acts to self and others, are contributory factors that affect the safety of others. Aggressive behaviors can lead to injuries to others and typically involve hitting, biting, and hair-pulling (Edelson, 2021). Establishing the purpose of SIB may be challenging, particularly if the individual speaks little or non-verbally. Self-injurious behavior (SIB) in children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a problem for school districts, particularly among self-contained classrooms. According to Dunlap and Kern (2018), understanding self-injurious behaviors allows educators to target interventions for nonverbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with ASD.

Continued research regarding this phenomenon in NV/MV secondary special education students with ASD, who display physical aggression and SIB in a self-contained classroom was paramount when trying to establish; positive relationships between teachers and students, provide additional non-verbal communication tools through facial affect recognition training, and establish the use of CPI training to ensure the overall safety, security, and well-being of all within the educational environment. “Challenging” behaviors are complex social phenomena developing due to transactional processes between the individual and contextual/social factors (Wolkorte et al. 2019, van den Bogaard et al. 2019, Cooper 2016, Hemmings 2007, Emerson 2001). Few studies have yet to address the effectiveness of multiple forms of non-verbal interventions used simultaneously for this unique population of students. One of the atypical

ways symptoms of psychiatric disorder may manifest in individuals with ASD and ID is as “challenging” behaviors, including self-injurious behaviors (SIB) (Rittmannsberger et al. 2020, Painter et al. 2018, Bitsika et al. 2016, Rzepecka et al. 2011).

Self-harm and physical aggression have been connected to ASD characteristics such as intellectual deficits and comorbid symptoms such as irritability and anxiety (Soke et al., 2016). According to Baweja et al. (2023), children with ASD and other comorbidities such as attention deficit hyperactive disorder exhibit physical aggression and self-injurious behaviors at a higher rate, making interventions necessary. Understanding self-harming behaviors and developing targeted interventions necessitate functional behavioral examination. Positive educational environments may also decrease animosity and self-harm. Baweja et al. (2023) note that SIB tendencies decrease as children grow especially with exposure to behavioral-based interventions that deter physical aggression and SIB tendencies. Nonverbal/minimally verbal secondary special education children with ASD required appropriate physical aggression and self-harm interventions. Self-harm has been connected to ASD characteristics such as intellectual deficits and comorbid symptoms such as anxiety and irritability (Dunlap & Kern, 2018). Besides, Kalvin et al. (2020) note that the combination of anxiety and ASD has been linked to a notable increase in physical aggression as children diagnosed with both experience high rates of irritability that leads to SIB and physical aggressiveness. Functional behavioral assessment and classroom positivity are two interventions. However, further research was needed to identify many effective nonverbal therapies suitable for these students. These tactics helped and supported students with ASD and problematic behaviors in and out of the classroom.

Caretakers and educators must often step in to ensure the safety of students who exhibit SIB. Duerden (2012) describes SIB behaviors exhibited within the classroom to include painless

practices such as head stroking to dangerously head thumping. These practices are noted by Handen et al. (2018) to be more prevalent among children with ASD who attend mainstream schools. Saputra et al. (2021) provided various non-verbal interventions that can be helpful within the classroom that reduce SIB. Implementing relationship building, facial affect recognition, and crisis prevention intervention training simultaneously to decrease these target behaviors associated with this population of students is vital while providing additional safety, security, and protective measures for all involved at school (Rogers et al., 2019). These practices are associated with increasing the comfort, security, and well-being of students at school and can be applied by caretakers and educators to improve the learning experience (Feng & Zhong, 2021).

Studies of hostility among children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) are largely lacking. According to Kanne & Mazurek (2011), aggressive conduct is a serious problem for people with ASD, their families, and their educators. However, according to Farmer (2016), greater age was related to more sophisticated aggressive tendencies in the control participants. Studies investigating the views of people with ASD/ID have reported that a wide range of causes may contribute to these behaviors (Van den Bogaard et al. 2019), including lack of structure and clarity in their daily lives leading to feelings of fear and restlessness (Wolkorte et al. 2019). Aggression is a difficult habit that may lead to many unfavorable consequences for people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), such as isolation, placement in restricted school and institutional settings, the need for physical treatments, and an increased risk of victimization (Fitzpatrick et al., 2016). Kanne & Mazurek (2011) add that aggressive behaviors contribute to staff fatigue, which harms the quality of teaching for kids with ASD. Baweja et al. (2023) also explain that children with ASD exhibiting physical aggression are likely to engage in defiant

behaviors to manage their sensory overload and the communication issues impact the quality of the learning environment. Finally, Fitzpatrick (2016) explains aggressiveness is a factor in the increased stress, financial difficulties, and lack of assistance services experienced by caregivers of persons with ASD, as well as a concerning effect on the day-to-day lives and wellness of the family unit. Therefore, understanding the effects of autism on the learning environment helped improve the quality of the learning environment.

Aggression and SIB are difficult behaviors that needed appropriate therapies to help enhance the life quality of people with ASD. Nearly 40% of students with Intellectual Disabilities (ID) spend at least half the day in special education classes (Office of Special Education Rehabilitative Services, 2016), and many students with severe disabilities spend much of their day in self-contained special education classrooms. Brignell et al. (2018) explained that verbally based and alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) interventions improve spoken and non-verbal communication in minimally verbal children with ASD. Gitimoghaddam et al. (2022) discussed the role of applied behavior analysis as a treatment approach for children with ASD with recommendations including improvement in communication between caregivers and the affected children. ABA uses many forms of non-verbal interventions for students with ASD. In particular, appropriate therapeutic approaches that can be adopted within the classroom can be key in advancing the quality of learning and other outcomes in the development of children with ASD (Ashburner et al., 2010). Consequently, there has been increased focus on developing successful interventions for problem behaviors in ASD including SIB (Scheithauer et al., 2019)

Verbal and non-verbal interventions to manage SIB and physical aggression among children with ASD can be applied within the classroom environment. Tager-Flusberg et al.

(2017) presented various forms of non-verbal interventions that were successful in managing physical aggression. On the other hand, McKinney et al., (2021) applied three non-verbal forms of interventions simultaneously with successful results in decreasing physical aggression in non-verbal secondary special education students with autism in a self-contained classroom.

Additionally, Tager-Flusberg and Kasari's (2013) non-verbal interventions were successful in young toddlers and preschoolers or older higher-functioning verbal children. The non-verbal interventions were mostly successful amongst verbal children due to ease of assessment.

Interventions on physical aggression have focused primarily on younger children while limited interventions exist for older students. Brignell et al. (2018) explain that there is an increased need for interventions focused on older children since the evidence shows most research is focused on minimally verbal children. Brignell et al. (2018) linked the phenomenon with limited teacher training, inadequate resources, and limited interest that limit interest in intervening for older minimally verbal students. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (2004) noted that among the IDEA 13 disability categories, ASD is reported as one of the most common worldwide. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, it was considered the third most common disability in the United States in 2013 (NCES, 2016). Jung & Lee (2020) explain that the presence of specialized teachers who can identify behavior patterns that contribute to aggressive behaviors is key to addressing SIB in ASD students. Therefore, interventions focused on children with ASD should include older students.

Behaviors exhibited by students with ASD pose a challenge in addressing aggression and SIB tendencies. Khaleel (2019) notes that students with ASD exhibit behaviors that challenge the classroom environment due to the level of aggression and SIB. According to Gitimoghaddam et al. (2022), autism spectrum disorder is a confusing and controversial disorder due to the

complexity of its manifestations, its different characteristics, and its interplay with many other disorders. The physical capacities of older students such as being bigger and stronger coupled with social skills and communication deficit due to being minimal or non-verbal increased the risks of physical aggression and SIB as distractions in the learning environment. People with ASD often also have language difficulties, and about 25% to 30% of children with ASD either fail to develop functional language or are minimally verbal (Brignell et al., 2018). These character traits played a vital role in student behaviors, student and staff safety, teacher attrition, and educator training. Students who are non-verbal/minimally verbal have demonstrated risk factors that contribute to this phenomenon (Bice, 2009). Social attention given contingent on challenging behaviors may reinforce them and lead to an increase (Edelson, 2022).

Behaviors

The classroom environment helped gauge the behaviors exhibited by children as they develop since they spend the majority of their time within the classroom. According to Bolinger et al. (2020), children spend the majority of their time within the classroom, making it the most suitable platform to assess student behaviors as they develop. Besides, Soke et al. (2016) note that children with disabilities especially ASD exhibit behaviors that cause harm and endanger them and others within the environment. Students with ASD, who demonstrated physical aggression and SIBs are not just limited to the classroom environments. Aggression and SIB are primary reasons for admission to psychiatric hospitals for autistic individuals (Righi et al., 2017; Siegel & Gabriels, 2014), and emotion dysregulation is significantly elevated in this population (Conner et al., 2021). The number of students with disabilities who identify with ASD has increased over the years and the behaviors they exhibit require increased interest in aggression and SIB tendencies within the classroom environment and other institutes (Manning et al., 2021).

There is a pressing need to extend autism research beyond the more accessible verbally fluent individuals with whom most cognitive and neuroimaging research has been conducted (Tager-Flusberg et al., 2017). On the other hand, traditional teaching and teachers have to ultimately find a core balance on how they now conduct their academic classrooms and manage crisis behaviors, which adds to their frustration in certain areas and disciplines of study (Park & Ramirez, 2022). Grant (2017) notes that responsibilities such as co-teaching, progress monitoring, developing individualized education plans (IEPs), accommodating student disabilities and modifying assignments, assessing, and assisting in planning curriculum have caused prospective teachers to think twice about entering into special education. Therefore, understanding and managing the aggressive and SIB behaviors of children with ASD should be a collaborative approach centered on improving the learning environment.

There are ample classroom behavioral objectives and factors that go into identifying, implementing, and maintaining acceptable forms of behaviors; especially in students with disabilities that can interfere with the overall learning environment and the learning of others. According to Jung and Lee (2020) educators have implemented, created, modified, and accommodated students with disabilities and diagnoses in education for years; but trying to successfully provide additional behavioral support and services for students with dangerous and assaultive behaviors has become an overwhelming task that most special educators aren't equipped to handle. However, some specialized teachers were found to lack confidence in working with children with ASD due to a lack of preparation, leading to a decline in teaching effectiveness (Jung & Lee, 2020). Having confidence and being knowledgeable in one's skills and abilities were crucial when working with children with ASD. Teenagers with ASD pose a significant threat to the learning environment due to their impulsive mentalities, larger physical

sizes, and uncanny strength associated with being much bigger, stronger, and older students (Gitimoghaddam et al., 2022). The presence of conflictive, violent students increases the possibility of others supporting and developing disruptive behavior conflict, or premeditated as part of planned attacks for the specific purpose of obtaining a reward as the result (Martínez et al., 2021). The obsessive behaviors associated with youths with ASD also contributed to harm or injury within the classroom as they opposed changes in the objects they are obsessed with by the educators and other stakeholders.

The role of sensory functions in students with ASD was significant since it influenced the behaviors adopted by the learners. Jung and Lee (2020) explain that sensory aspects contribute to the immediate need for reinforcements and reinforcers to manage the traits exhibited by young people with ASD. This was oftentimes the reasoning behind student aggression and SIB in students with ASD. Hence, interventions for aggressive behaviors in children and adolescents with ASD are critical, not only to improve their social interactions but also to keep them safe and protected (Jung & Lee, 2020). This can result in reduced quality of life and fewer opportunities to participate in the community (Brignell et al., 2018). Therefore, safety was always viewed as a top priority in the learning environment and general surroundings.

Physical Aggression

Physical aggression at school can occur anywhere at any time, and without warning leaving many educators, parents, and school districts feeling lost and afraid for their students. Aggressive behavior is an especially prevalent and troubling concern that often occurs across settings (Kalvin et al., 2023). Students with ASD and MV/NV exhibit behaviors of physical aggression fueled by their sensory challenges and the ever-changing world which challenges their capacities. When NV/MV secondary special education students with ASD get angry,

frustrated, or frightened the results can be devastating (Anderson et al., 2016). Elevated levels of irritability and aggression occur in almost half of children with ASD (Lecavalier et al., 2019). Both irritability, which refers to proneness to anger and frustration (Brotman et al., 2017), and aggression, which refers to behaviors that cause risk of harm to self or others, can cause substantial impairment in children with ASD (Sukhodolsky et al., 2019).

In education the sector, Tager-Flusberg et al. (2017) note that physical aggression is an important aspect especially when teaching in the special education sector. In particular, Tager-Flusberg et al. (2017) explain that physical aggression is likely to morph into a safety concern for the students and the teachers leading to challenges in hiring and retaining qualified personnel. Aggressive behavior involves violent conduct intended to physically or verbally harm or hurt others (Martínez et al., 2021). Akman (2021) notes that exposure to aggression leads to several risky behaviors and various mental problems. Bawenja et al. (2023) further illustrate that safety within the learning environment is key to healthy learning. Numerous analogies and reasoning are associated with physical aggression with ASD within the classroom and how exposure to violent traits in ASD children replicates as they get older and they adopt unhealthy practices that harm them and others within the learning environment (Fitzpatrick et al., 2016).

School-age children exhibited behaviors that disrupted the learning environment and combining these traits with those associated with ASD posed a significant learning challenge. Akman (2021) notes that physical aggression and SIB tendencies within the learning environment affect the quality of learning. Some everyday behaviors that can challenge teachers include talking without permission, being off-task, and not raising your hand to get the teacher's attention correctly (Akman, 2021). Existing interventions such as general classroom rules, procedures, and consequences helped address the everyday challenges of teaching children.

However, for MV/NV students with ASD, other interventions were needed to address unhealthy behaviors that challenge the children's development. Akman (2021) addresses various classroom management strategies that can improve the learning environment and increase positive outcomes. Therefore, learners exhibited physical aggression that impacted the safety of other learners and their ability to grasp learning content.

ASD is not itself a violent or dangerous disorder, and not all people with autism are more aggressive than those who do not have ASD. Nonetheless, children with ASD are reported to have more aggressive behaviors when compared to children with intellectual disabilities or Down syndrome (Jung & Lee, 2020). Leader et al. (2020) note that early identification of ASD symptoms is crucial so that the child can receive the most appropriate and effective interventions. ASD is a disorder that has been further researched and reviewed, especially in the areas of NV/MV secondary students with physical aggression and SIB.

Self-injurious Behaviors

Self-injurious behavior (SIB) is a common aspect among individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities including autism (I/DD). Furthermore, according to Cantin-Garside et al., (2020) children who exhibit severe SIB often lack the verbal and cognitive abilities to report their SIB occurrence and discuss their motivation. SIB is among the most clinically disturbing, socially costly, and scientifically challenging behavior disorders (Dimian & Symons, 2022). In education settings, self-injurious behavior is common as the children can cause physical pain to themselves using learning objects (Lucas et al., 2019). Sullivan et al. (2019) explain that self-injurious behavior is a common insight in understanding the challenges of educating children with ASD. In particular, in special education settings, Jung and Lee (2020) note that educators should understand the ideas and analogies that influence the role of disabilities in SIB tendencies

to establish solutions and appropriate interventions. According to Esteves et al. (2021), aggression was reported to occur in 11% to 85% of youths across studies, and SIB to occur in 5% to 80%, with higher rates in samples of children with autism or genetic syndromes (e.g., fragile X syndrome). These percentages and studies are great indicators that has impacted and affected individual behaviors and responses in students with autism. The reported prevalence of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) has been consistently increasing over time (Stichter et al., 2021). Therefore, an increased understanding of the impact of SIB in the learning environment was necessary.

Interventions to SIB are challenging and require collaborative approaches to manage cost and other resources needed. Self-injury can be highly treatment-resistant and the cost of care is considerable (Dimian & Symons, 2022). Children with ASD are likely to be associated with other social, emotional, and behavioral challenges (Handen et al., 2018). In particular, these factors contributed to increased costs as school districts, parents, and communities operate on low budgets. Saputra et al. (2021) note that aggressive behaviors by students in special education classes are common and contribute to SIB. Besides, self-injurious behavior has also been negatively associated with expressive language in children with ASD (Baghdadli et al., 2003). Behaviors that are learned can be replaced with an alternative behavior during the implementation of various interventions (Haday & Brue, 2016).

According to McKinney et al. (2021), challenging behavior is one of the main hurdles and suggests solutions such as redirecting the child's attention, changing the activity, offering a short break, or ignoring outbursts. On the other hand, Dimian and Symons (2022) argue that incidence is most useful for evaluating the effectiveness of programs that try to prevent conditions from occurring in the first place. These strategies helped understand the prevalence

and challenges associated with secondary-level students with ASD and minimal or non-verbal capabilities.

Autism

There was increased interest in autism within the school setting due to its influence on the quality of education and life of children with ASD. Research in the field of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) has flourished over the past two decades (Tager-Flusberg and Kasari, 2013). However, Jung and Lee (2020) note that there are significant gaps in understanding the learning environment and the role of educators within the secondary special education self-contained classrooms dealing with behaviors and interventions that are deemed effective for this age group. The literature on minimally verbal children with ASD is quite sparse and there is little consistency in the definition of this group (Tager-Flusberg and Kasari, 2013). For generations, professionals have struggled to find appropriate ways to deal with the problem behaviors of students with autism in the classroom (Almutlaq, 2021). ASD is one of the highest growing disabilities in the field of regular and special education, and preparing educators right now with the specific knowledge and training that are beneficial to the overall student and staff safety and concerns are of paramount importance moving forward (Jung & Lee, 2020). Therefore, with more and more students being diagnosed with autism, educational environments are being assessed and analyzed to provide better means and additional services and supports to this population of students.

The data on autism within the learning environment was useful in understanding the behaviors that impacted the learning environment. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2020), in the 2018–2019 school year 11% of the special education population, or 781,000 students, were identified in the Autism category. Gitimoghaddam et al.

(2022) define autism is a neurodevelopment disorder that can affect social-emotional communication and social skills, and can cause a broad range of behaviors including physical aggression and SIB. Hence, exploring a new approach to aggression management in children and adolescents with autism, based on specialized teachers' perceptions and intervention practices, is worthwhile (Jung & Lee, 2020). Understanding this data prepared the education system to make appropriate improvements that were beneficial in the development of children with ASD and minimize physical aggression and SIB.

Aggressive behaviors in children and adolescents with ASD are described as maladaptive behaviors, involving a combination of anger, hostility, vigilance, and anxiety, and are divided into extraverted and introverted aggression (Jung & Lee, 2020). The current prevalence rate for autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) diagnoses is significantly greater than in previous years (Johnson et al., 2017). Past and current research indicates that with ASD numbers on the rise, specific interventions that are geared to decrease physical aggression and SIB are of the utmost importance in moving forward and adding to the existing body of literature (Harris, 2023). Allowing future research, a better-guided framework when dealing with this significant topic of concern.

Social Skills

Autism impacts the social development of children and may result in delayed milestones. Compounding these social difficulties, children with ASD tend to show declines in social adaptive behavior over time (Pugliese et al., 2015), as they acquire social skills at a rate slower than same-age peers (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). In particular, Roberts et al. (2022) explain that autistic children's social skills do not always align with those of neurotypical people. Further, Lucas et al. (2019) note that children with autism and other developmental disabilities are

considered by educators, parents, and other medical personnel as having a high rate of challenging behaviors committed against themselves and others. These aspects are a result of not properly and adequately being able to express their immediate wants and needs in a normal and rational way; therefore, they may result in using physical aggression and assaultive behaviors as a means of communicating these wants, needs, desires, and requests (Baweja et al., 2023). When determining the causes of problem behaviors, it is seen that teachers focus more on behaviors than their causes, that is, they focus on “how” rather than the cause (Kocak & Sari, 2021). Focusing solely on the behaviors of children with ASD resulted in a negative outlook towards them and may not provide a complete understanding of their condition. Additionally, the limited cognitive developmental processes of students with disabilities could hinder their ability to comprehend and benefit from social skills training. As a result, it was crucial to consider the underlying causes of their behavior and provide appropriate support and training to help them develop social skills.

Social skills interventions (SSIs) are critical for promoting social, emotional, and behavioral competence for students with EBD and/or ASD (Hutchins et al., 2020). Therefore, it is critical to implement multiple forms of non-verbal interventions simultaneously for students who are NV/MV in areas of the need to help them identify positive and negative behaviors and responses in individuals with ASD, who have these skills deficits in transitioning and generalizing into other learning environments (McKinney et al., 2021). Thus, the transition process may cause students with autism to act inappropriately during a school day (Almutlaq, 2021). In recent studies, attention has been given to autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and how it is affecting children in their natural development and learning environments, at early stages (Lord et al., 2018). This concern is because early intervention and finding appropriate solutions

and strategies in improving the skills of individuals with autism spectrum disorder at an early age enable them to face difficult challenges (Khaleel, 2019). Unfortunately, students who enter school without these skills can struggle socially and academically (Nelson et al., 2018). Therefore, this indicated a viable need to close the research gap regarding insufficient or little progress in these critical areas of concern.

There are notable challenges in the study of autism and its influence on social skills. According to Stevenson et al., (2019), children with ASD continue to exhibit social skills below their agemates. Sullivan et al. (2019) note that children with ASD also experience social anxiety at significant rates compared to others within their age categories and this affects their ability to form social and emotional connections that could influence their physical aggression and SIB. Moreover, teachers working with secondary students with ASD experienced difficulties with social skills due to communication barriers that exacerbated and heightened physical aggression and SIB. In particular, Jung and Lee (2020) explain that specialized teachers are needed with communication skills to manage the negative behaviors associated with ASD. For example, Kalvin et al. (2020) note that children with ASD experience high levels of irritability which contributes to unhealthy behaviors such as self-harm and aggression towards others. However, when teachers are uneducated and do not have information about these practices, they can't perform these practices in their classrooms (Kocak & Sari, 2021). These types of obstacles in the learning environments furthered delayed what appropriate actions and responses teachers can effectively and ineffectively implement and accomplish in the classrooms.

Communication

Effective communication was crucial to the study of special education students with ASD, particularly those who have limited verbal abilities. Several other studies have also

demonstrated a link between communication deficits and aggressive behavior in children with ASD (Boonen et al., 2014; Hartley et al., 2008) and are consistent with the notion that aggressive tendencies may serve a communicative function in children who lack more adaptive ways of communicating feelings of frustration and anger (Lindgren et al., 2020). The ability to communicate is a crucial life skill, and difficulties with communication can have a range of negative consequences such as poorer academic performance, poorer quality of life, and behavioral difficulties (Brignell et al., 2018). Students with autism often have communication issues that lead to problem behaviors (Almutlaq, 2021). Furthermore, when communication deficits accompany and/or give rise to aggressive behavior, children with ASD may be at a particularly heightened risk of social difficulties Kalvin et al., (2023).

Students with ASD who demonstrated these target behaviors of concern put themselves and others at extreme risk of imminent harm and danger. The clearest risk these behaviors pose is the threat of injury to the students themselves and those around them (Stevenson et al., 2019). Clear communication tools and acceptable forms of communication were crucial when working with NV/MV secondary special education students with physical aggression, SIB, and ASD in specialized programs.

Teachers experienced difficulties communicating with children who have limited verbal capabilities combined with the challenges associated with ASD. According to Kocak and Sari (2021), these challenges include the lack of practical advice and support for behavior management and teaching methods, and problems in the management of certain behaviors, such as aggressive behaviors, sometimes associated with children with autism. Besides, Lucas et al. (2019) noted the impacts of communication barriers when working with children with ASD and how it affects the quality of care, they receive within the learning institutions. However, the last

decade has seen a growth of interest in research for autistic children with profound communication difficulties (McKinney et al., 2021). Pushing research forward in the field of ASD and being more knowledgeable in specific areas of autism is at the forefront of learning, but continues to be a subject of deep interest and concern (Damiano et al., 2014).

In replicating Skinner's behaviorism theory, some of the major components of using multiple forms of non-verbal interventions associated with applied behavior analysis (ABA) techniques and strategies were used to produce effective and efficient interactions within the students' natural learning environment. Communication interventions generally aim to improve children's ability to communicate either through speech or by supplementing speech with other means (e.g. sign language or pictures) (Brignell et al., 2018). Some critics of BF Skinner believed that his theory of behaviorism ascertained that humans could be trained like animals. This evoked early human rights activists and they criticized Skinner's unorthodox methodology of comparing animals with humans; affirming that humans, unlike animals, were much more highly sophisticated and spiritual beings, and therefore shouldn't be categorized in the same experiments. Although criticism of Skinner's theory was evident in some scholars, others agreed with some or partial views of Skinner's behavioral approach towards changing or shaping human behaviors.

This impacted future research and studies and how other scientists, historians, philosophers, and behaviorists viewed radical behaviorism and its movement with children with ASD and other disabilities (Moser, 2010). These and other communication deficits associated with ASDs challenge researchers and teachers to develop evidence-based interventions that can improve the communication outcomes of young children with autism during early childhood (Johnson et al., 2017). Some theories suggested, that students with ASD

can learn appropriate communication skills that helped them build upon and maintain their social skills and expanded their repertoire.

Applied behavior analysis (ABA) has become a main fixture in the advancement and development of children with autism. Despite the widespread applicability of ABA for the instruction and support of students with a range of abilities, it has become synonymous with interventions designed for students with ASD (Trump et al., 2018). When working with secondary special education students with ASD, utilizing multiple forms of non-verbal interventions simultaneously, along with ABA techniques and strategies, were highly effective in decreasing or controlling unwanted challenging behaviors. A child with autism may not speak but still be able to count blocks, draw shapes, or complete other tasks that are further along developmental assessments normed with typically developing children (McKinney et al., 2021).

Safety

Safety concerns for all involved within the learning environment are a factor to consider when assessing specialized education settings. Hence, interventions for aggressive behaviors in children and adolescents with ASD are critical, not only to improve their social interactions, but also to keep them safe and protected (Jung & Lee, 2020). Safety and security are the foundational building blocks in society. According to Akman (2021), we often encounter incidents of aggression today in all segments of society. In particular, Tekin-Iftar et al. (2020) note that children with ASD are susceptible to SIB and abuse at a higher rate and this increases as the children's communication capacities decline. Teachers and staff members want to come to work with the idea and concepts of helping students learn, making learning fun and engaging, and fulfilling both personal and professional goals and objectives. Positive teacher and student relationships have been around for years, as teachers nurture and help build young minds to be

better prepared for their future endeavors and their roles in society. Safety in the classrooms is paramount in building and creating a successful, safe, and nurturing learning environment for everyone. In many cultures, teachers are expected both to act as models for their students and to provide them with some form of protection, in a relationship of care (De Cordova et al., 2019). Students across classes today exhibit academic, behavioral, social-emotional, and psychological differences, needs, wants, and desires. Safety, security, and supervision are the main frameworks across many school districts in America (Sprague & Walker, 2021).

Various legal and ethical expectations should be met to ensure the learning environment are conducive for all students. Merry (2019) examined existing laws requiring inclusion and how they impact the safety of learners with ASD. There are laws at the federal, state, and city levels that are enacted to protect students' rights and freedoms from such acts of reckless, intentional, or accidental conduct of behaviors inflicted by students. School districts have tried to provide their individual and universal assessments of what behaviors are considered most harmful and dangerous. These behavioral codes of conduct also helped identify what specific behaviors are deemed less dangerous and detrimental in the school environment and the eyes of the law. As stated above, their job is to identify barriers and respond to the unique needs of the individual child (Brinser & Wissel, 2020; Martin, 2015).

Laws in special education have also been under review to assess physical aggression and SIB in students with ASD. These laws take into consideration that these inappropriate behavioral acts may be caused by a manifestation of the student's disability (Merry, 2019). Many school districts don't feel completely safe due to the continued attacks on staff members and students in schools all across America. According to Robinson et al., (2023) the trauma that is associated with attacks can cause long-lasting effects that not only disrupt the classroom learning

environment but impact educators' and students' lives outside of the classrooms, as well. Akman (2021) pointed out that the victims of aggression can have psychological, physical, and social destruction. To be proactive schools have looked at varying levels and systems of support by utilizing extra resources and funding in light of these increased incidents. Akman (2021) also argued that additional professional support in the form of school resource officers (SROs) and certified and registered security guards to maintain safety and security on school campuses. Students and staff members who have been affected by violent acts are being offered outside professional help for future trauma through individual or group counseling.

Student Safety

According to June and Lee (2023) interventions for aggressive behaviors of people with ASD have used a behavioral focus to improve safety skills and education in real-world settings. Student safety within the classroom is paramount and ASD contributes to injurious behaviors that threaten their bodies and others within the classroom. According to Mazano (2007), classroom management is still a major weakness in some schools. Students with autism have been associated with demonstrating challenging behaviors and self-injurious acts against themselves and others in the classroom environment continually (Baweja et al., 2023). In today's special education self-contained classrooms, the environment can be unpredictable with student outbursts, disruptions, and physically acting-out behaviors. Unfortunately, this has made it almost impossible to provide safety and care for both students and teachers. Students need safe havens and secure places where they can feel safe, as they trust and rely on their teachers to create a nurturing environment. According to De Cordova et al. (2019), having a good relationship with students is usually associated with the perception of reciprocated trust between student and teacher. Classroom management is intended to provide students with more

opportunities to learn all the things that a teacher does to organize students, space, time, and materials so that students' learning can take place (Sieberer-Nagler, 2016). Today's unique special education programs and learning environments present educators with the opportunities to teach and design amazing curriculums and lesson plans to match the individual needs of all students with disabilities.

Some forms and means of providing classroom safety in the learning environment are needed to teach and manage students' behaviors. There are various cases and examples from around the world of education regarding physical attacks from students on staff and other peers. Akman (2021) links individual, family, and environmental factors to underlying aggressive behaviors. McKinney et al. (2021) recognize that it is challenging to assess the physical aggression of children with autism and complex needs within the learning environment. Therefore, school districts must provide additional means of successful and effective interventions for students with special needs, to feel protected and keep safe.

Staff Safety

Teachers face safety challenges within the teaching environment in their attempts to intervene when students exhibit aggressive behaviors (Peterson & Skiba, 2000). Therefore, parents and teachers have difficulties in dealing with the challenging behaviors of children and adolescents with autism, and take actions to control their behaviors in an effort to reduce negative outcomes (Jung & Lee, 2020). Some teachers have reported that their schools don't enforce policies about aggressive behaviors (Marzano, 2007). This puts teachers at risk of physical harm or injury along with their regular job duties of teaching the curriculum and preparing students for tests and examinations. Today's secondary special education staff members must also face the difficult tasks of being prepared for students with developmental

disabilities and diagnoses whose target behaviors of concern are; hitting, kicking, biting, spitting, scratching, pinching, and head-butting staff, peers, or themselves (Edelson, 2021). De Cordova et al. (2019) explain that this leads to the conclusion that strategies designed to prevent violence have not yet proven entirely effective, leaving education professionals at risk of some form of aggression.

Today's classroom professionals must also be well-prepared and versed in handling multiple forms of behavioral challenges and crises that are deemed as safety risks and concerns for students and staff. When considering different types of challenging behaviors (CBs), the most common behaviors assessed were aggression and self-injury (Simó-Pinatella et al., 2019). In recent times, there have been increased incidents of assaults on staff and peers, which are attributed to dangerous behaviors exhibited by students in the learning environment. This has sparked thought-provoking questions and debates in schools, homes, and community settings. To address this issue, it was crucial that schools build strong relationships with their students to help identify the underlying causes of these aggressive behaviors. While job satisfaction and good relationships can be seen as elements that contribute to well-being at work, many teachers are exposed to violent incidents that impair their well-being (De Cordova et al., 2019).

Therefore, Jung and Lee (2020) recommend that specialized teachers with sufficient skills can contribute positively to managing aggression within the learning environment and improve the learning experience. Providing sufficient non-verbal interventions to protect student and staff safety and care was of the utmost importance when working with NV/MV secondary special education students with ASD, physical aggression, and SIB. Given the significant challenges inherent in the assessment of cognitive, linguistic, and behavioral skills in the minimally verbal child with ASD, there is a need for new methods that involve exclusively

passive paradigms, no overt responding, or even the ability to understand instructions (Tager-Flusberg and Kasari, 2013). Increased research on suitable interventions that contributed to positive outcomes was necessary. Therefore, a positive school culture and an inviting learning environment should play a vital part and critical role in identifying positive behavioral themes and trends in reducing aggression at school. Classroom safety is still under review as to what available resources and materials are readily on hand to prevent such behaviors and all educational facilities should work hard to make learning fun and engaging, but also safe.

Teacher Attrition

In today's special education classrooms, special education teachers are hard to find, and even harder to keep. Persistent shortage of credentialed special education teachers (SETs) in the United States continues to exist (Peyton et al., 2020). Teacher attrition has been linked to many personal and professional factors and extenuating circumstances within school districts across the country. Teacher attrition has long been identified as a challenge for educational systems worldwide (Elyashiv, 2019). Humans are social animals (Jung & Lee, 2020). Positive interactions amongst other colleagues and students helped build trust and rapport. When it comes to attracting and hiring teachers for specialized programs of interest like special education, school districts try to hire the best highly qualified, and skilled applicants who apply.

In the United States, as per the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) and IDEA (2004), special education teachers must be highly qualified. But once under contract and ready for work these applicants, are first-year graduates, transfers from other programs or schools, veteran teachers who have been around for years, or, individuals from other walks of life who now want a career change. Almost every year, teachers from all grade levels, certifications, educational backgrounds, and cultural, political, economic, and geographical areas are coming into the

teaching profession with little to no educational tools that prepare them for such tasks. Teachers are the most important variable in the education of a student (Marzano, 2003). Without such tools, teachers are consistently leaving the profession due to a lack of sufficient training or support.

The challenge with physical aggressive and self-injurious behaviors in secondary special education students with autism, is that the learning environment once was an engaging and fun place to learn has now turned into a teacher's educational nightmare. In particular, potentially harmful and dangerous behaviors have left students and staff in disbelief and disarray. Special education teachers need appropriate preparation to effectively serve students exhibiting challenging behaviors (Almutlaq, 2021). Without appropriate training on how to effectively serve this student population, the threat of imminent harm puts teachers at unnecessary risks that many educators aren't willing to take (Akman, 2021).

Therefore, school districts have put together intricate plans, special task forces, and committees to try and brainstorm effective means and ways to keep students and staff from imminent harm and danger, to keep learning fun and engaging, and to maintain overall safety and security in self-contained classrooms. A deeper understanding of teacher perspectives on such behaviors may provide administrators with valuable information as well as knowledge on the support teachers need (Almutlaq, 2021). Despite initiatives implemented to address the serious issue of violence in schools, it remains an emerging concern (De Cordova et al., 2019). Therefore, the need for additional interventions aimed at decreasing school violence on all levels was paramount in moving forward with future research in the areas of ASD.

Educator Training

In their ever-expanding roles, educators are trying to provide behavior management systems that are effective and efficient in special education classrooms, as challenging behaviors are of paramount concern. According to Kocak and Sari (2021), training educators on classroom management when working with students with ASD and problem behaviors is essential. The approaches help avoid chaos, confusion, and disruptions that can impact the quality of learning (Albert, 2020). Inadequate educator training or the lack thereof is one of the most debated and talked about issues when regarding what are the best interventions available to use for physical aggression and SIB.

Research literature in the field of education and behavior found that districts are not only accountable for providing certain interventions when disciplining students identified with special needs but also it is best practices (Albert, 2020). Further, Chezan et al. (2022) explain that training teachers who work with special needs children, especially ASD is essential for ensuring quality services and high efficiency. Kocak and Sari (2021) support this approach explaining that knowledge on ASD behavior management helps maintain a learning environment centered on suitable interventions implemented by highly trained teachers. Khaleel (2019) also supports the need for developing teachers' skills continuously as this helps in the growth and development of appropriate knowledge that benefits the learners. Esqueda Villegas et al. (2022) noted that most teachers are familiar with their skill inadequacies when working with special needs children especially ASD exhibiting problem behaviors as they focus on the behaviors rather than the root causes. Educator training that was essential to adequate job performance and requirements in critical needs areas about special education oftentimes requires additional certifications, training,

and professional development in those areas of high need when dealing with significant behavioral challenges.

Behavior management systems in schools are being utilized due to the increased number of incidents with students with ASD and the magnitude in which these incidents occur. Skinner's findings signified that the use of non-verbal interventions could be replicated and used on humans in their natural surroundings and also in different settings. The results of those early experiments have been replicated thousands of times with different species and under a wide variety of circumstances (Schlinger, 2021). Thus, increasing and giving credibility to the number of studies that are similar to Skinner's behavioral theory towards changing behaviors and conditioning through environmental stimuli in their natural and other settings.

Interventions

Interventions in special education have been a mainstay for years but finding the right intervention and evidence-based best practice interventions are of critical need when working with such a unique population of students. Intervention studies often exclude 'low functioning' potentially nonverbal children (Tager-Flusberg et al. 2017). However, the premise of using multiple methods of non-verbal interventions simultaneously were applied to NV/MV secondary special education students with autism to decrease the future likelihood of physical aggression and self-injurious behaviors towards self or others from occurring again or in decreasing amounts. Hence, exploring a new approach to aggression management in children and adolescents with autism, based on specialized teachers' perceptions and intervention practices, is worthwhile (Jung & Lee, 2020).

These strategies focus on addressing the challenges and behavioral problems teachers face in dealing with individuals with special needs in general and autism spectrum disorder in

particular (Khaleel, 2019). As more school districts invest the time and training to implement a systemic behavioral plan, schools can experience positive change (Dunlap & Kern, 2018). Typically, when addressing students' challenging behaviors, interventions that address verbalization deficits and language barriers, along with other physical, social-emotional, and psychological areas of concern are of critical necessity early in the identification process. Early Intensive Behavioral Interventions (EIBI) are primarily aimed at identifying students with disabilities at young ages and then applying these findings to create and develop age-appropriate and effective interventions (Hepburn, 2021). Interventions aimed at early detection are beneficial when focusing on the initial functions of such challenging behaviors.

Literary studies suggest that implementing a function-based crisis intervention (FBCI) model represents the behavioral and theoretical framework as an effective and efficient behavioral analytical reduction strategy used in schools (Stevenson, 2017). The FBCI guidelines adhere to expert recommendations for implementing a comprehensive treatment model to reduce challenging behaviors in students with ASD. Due to the rising number of incidents and the severity of target behaviors demonstrated by students with autism, interventions and their role in behavior management in schools have become increasingly important. Early intervention, was a key element that helped and supported students with autism in the school environment. According to Jung and Lee (2020), previous studies have proposed a variety of interventions for the management of aggressive behaviors in children and adolescents with autism, and many of them were developed with a focus on the role of specialized teachers and applied to school settings.

Relationship Building

Building positive relationships are paramount in the world of special education. The idea that teachers require the capacity to build positive, supportive relationships with students is widely recognized today (Aspelin et al. 2021). While teachers are loved and appreciated, they are also, undertrained, underprepared, underpaid, and overworked. Students with disabilities not only need academic structure, but social-emotional and behavioral structure and discipline, as well as positive relationships with peers. Peer relationships and having possibilities to participate are essential to every child (Chen et al. 2020, 2019; Foley et al. 2012; Moore-Dean, Renwick, and Schormans 2016).

When developing, building, and maintaining a healthy relationship of any kind, key elements must be in place for everyone involved. The literature reminds us that there is nothing more vital to overall student success and functioning than having a highly positive structured, and engaging learning environment. When these dynamics are combined it makes learning fun and worthwhile and creates a positive and healthy relationship between a teacher and student. Additionally, teachers who struggle with building healthy and positive relationships suffer both personally and professionally. Culture influences student learning (Deal & Peterson, 2016).

In particular, child behavior problems have been consistently shown to contribute to higher levels of teacher stress, lower levels of teaching efficacy, and poorer student–teacher relationship quality (Eisenhower., 2015; Herman et al. 2018, 2020). Thus, the inclusion of autistic students may feel daunting for general education teachers who have to adapt their usual practices to meet these social, emotional, and behavioral needs, often without sufficient support or training (Bolourian et al. 2022). Culture and environment are critical when working with students with disabilities and disorders. Autism is and of itself, a unique disorder, and oftentimes

some children are born with non-communicable speech such as being NV/MV. While the majority of these children increased their single-word utterances, only about one-third moved into phrase speech (Tager-Flusberg and Kasari, 2013). Parents, teachers, and other organizations are working fervently at making such distinct and diverse populations of children like this equal and similar to their peers without such disabilities by making the playing field the same or similar concerning academic, behavioral, and social-emotional learning, communication, and language. According to Mazon et al. (2022) Having good parent-teacher relationships offer continuity between the student's living environments, which is beneficial to their development at several levels (e.g., academic, social, emotional, behavioral). Therefore, all relationships are critical in the overall well-being of the student. Children with disabilities have difficulties in forming social relations and be involved (De Boer et al. 2013; Chen et al. 2019).

With the needs of students increasing, educators must become skilled in the delivery of positive behavioral support for all students in a caring nurturing environment regardless of external contributing causes (Betts et al., 2014). Now, notwithstanding individual differences and similarities, there are common characteristics and traits such as physical aggression and SIB demonstrated in some children with ASD. Therefore, educators must develop, maintain, and nurture positive and acceptable forms of communication through personal and professional relationships that can aid in the process of handling crises and dangerous behaviors. Teachers must always keep the dignity of a child intact and view them through the lens of respect (Betts et al., 2014). This was the ultimate and true value and test of any type of intervention implemented.

Any type of de-escalation and redirection method comes first by knowing your students' strengths and weaknesses and their capabilities in these times of immediate peril; and then being able to calm them down and refocus on acceptable alternative behaviors, instead of self-injury to

self or harming others. Safety concerns are crucial elements that are vital for students, teachers, and administrative staff to be constantly aware of. Research and common sense demonstrate the importance of shared responsibility (Marzano, 2007). That was why, not only reading students' past and current information was vital in building rapport and trust, but it was also very important when assessing future strategies and interventions that have been proven effective in past incidents. Non-verbal, as well as verbal strategies demonstrated and acknowledged by all staff and support staff regarding student behaviors, are critical in specialized learning environments. Such behaviors include both verbal and nonverbal messages to students, such as a pat on the back, a nod, and comments like "Nice job!" and "Thank you for doing that." (Marzano, 2007).

Relationship-building skills are quintessentially one of the main true building blocks that any educator at any grade, skill, or professional level must create and maintain to a great degree before any worthwhile human connection towards student trust and respect can be formed inside the classroom environment; especially in a student's latter years of schooling and education particularly students with disabilities. This means that the teacher becomes the key actor in the creation of productive activities and good relations in the classroom (Postholm, 2016). Previous studies have shown that when teachers initiate and foster positive and healthy relationships in the classrooms, students thrive (Collie & Perry, 2019). These skills are both personal and professional, but they allow students to see that teachers are genuine, trustworthy, and human; which opened the door to greater accomplishments due to both showing a much more personal approach, by showing respect for each other.

Facial Affect Recognition

Facial affect recognition is an age-old process that has been dated back centuries

during early childbirth. One ongoing debate concerns whether certain discrete, “basic” emotions have evolutionarily based signals (i.e., facial expressions) that are easily and universally identified (e.g., Ekman, 1994; Izard, 1994) or whether emotion experience, expression, and perception are highly variable processes, potentially influenced by language (e.g., Barrett, 2017; Russell, 1994). It was introduced when parents and infants come together for the very first time and give the first initial glimpse into life when they are born; as they first make facial connections in the form of eye contact, smiles, grins, body language, proximity, and looks of excitement and joy. This was the first form of facial affect recognition and identifiable communication form that brings both parents and infants together. However, young children and youth, and the parents of children with physical aggression, SIB, and ASD oftentimes find it difficult to communicate effectively due to their disabilities in identifying key facial and emotional elements and traits. Impaired facial affect recognition may also contribute to both negative and positive symptoms (Bordon et al., 2017). Thus, it was important to understand how impaired facial affect influenced unhealthy social and emotional behaviors such as aggression and SIB. Children with ASD often show signs of processing difficulties of affective stimuli and social cues, which leads to problems recognizing emotions in social interactions Wagener et al., (2021).

Facial affect recognition training connections are the first visual connections that students and staff make toward identifying key characteristics in students’ behaviors and demeanors. When students struggle, they express their discomfort through crying, kicking, or hitting (Almutlaq, 2021). Not only is SIB prevalent in people with ASD, but the presence and severity of these maladaptive behaviors pose significant functional limitations (Gulsrud et al., 2018). According to Keating and Cook (2021), people with ASD exhibit expressive differences that

make it difficult to recognize neurotypical facial expressions and vice versa. Emotion recognition was key to building social and emotional interactions and the failure to recognize facial emotions, especially for NV/MV students creates a communication barrier. Nagy et al. (2021) note that while facial motion recognition is not key to diagnosing mental disorders, it is important for social interactions and failure to recognize or express emotions properly affects communication between ASD students and their environment.

Moreover, Jelili et al. (2021) noted that impairment in the recognition of facial emotions differs across ages, and with the right tools, students can learn and improve their capacities, enhancing their communication abilities. Therefore, it was essential to introduce resources at an early age that sets up children with ASD for success. Facial affect recognition was paramount when assessing students with ASD, who are NV/MV and exhibit target behaviors such as physical aggression and SIB towards self or others. Being able to quickly assess and recognize these facial features and factors could be the difference between staff being preventative and proactive or staff having to deal with the repercussions of injuries or damage caused by students' dangerous behaviors and outbursts Dollion et al. (2022). Thus, Oakley et al. (2022) suggest that interventions for improving social communication in autism should not only focus on social skills, such as other-facial expressions (OFE) recognition, but also self-emotional awareness, such as self-facial expressions (SFE) recognition.

Most special education teachers who graduate from colleges or universities receive minimal training in evidence-based approaches to handling students with autism (The National Research Council, 2001). It was of great importance for special education staff members to be very knowledgeable and trained in utilizing multiple forms of effective non-verbal techniques simultaneously like proximity (giving the student room to calm down and keeping staff safe),

quick and easy hand gestures (giving the okay signal or thumbs up or down), facial affect recognition of students moods and emotions (such as anger, frustration, scared, anxious, or frightened) and identifying body language and posturing (students threatening or non-threatening mannerisms like fists balled up, pacing around, crying or yelling). Special education teachers need adequate support from schools to gain appropriate knowledge and experiences of different evidence-based practice approaches, including ABA (Almutlaq, 2021). All these non-verbal dynamics and signs gave educators real-world indicators for making quick decisions and judgment calls; first by identifying key elements that were crucial in decreasing these target areas of concern and secondly by keeping students and staff safe from harm or injury.

Visual representation of significant facial features and body language allows special educators first-hand knowledge through visual inspections of how a student's morning, afternoon, or day is going; and also, it can present visual evidence of how abruptly it can change for the worse, especially when working with students with autism who are prone to showing varying degrees of behavioral outbursts in the classroom environment. All students have the right to receive appropriate education, including students with disabilities; and better education can be delivered through well-trained teachers (Almutlaq, 2021). Therefore, staff members were able to have the proper training and guidance to increase positive attributes and decrease negative ones, when working with students who count on and depend on facial affect components for continued success in specialized learning environments.

Crisis Prevention Institute

Safety is one of the major concerns with regards to special education students and staff. More recent research indicates that children with a diagnosis of ASD and intellectual disability continue to experience higher rates of restraint compared to those without those diagnoses

(O'Donoghue et al., 2020). Severe behavior, such as aggression, self-injury, and property destruction, is more common in individuals with ASD than their neurotypical peers (Newcomb & Hagopian, 2018). Therefore, the need for more advanced help in the form of positive physical restraints strategies and techniques being implemented are at the forefront of school safety. Applying restraint is a common strategy for managing severe behavior, despite associated increases in an individual's risk of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder following restraint implementation (Evans & Cotter, 2008; Friedman & Crabb, 2018).

Crisis prevention institute (CPI) is an evidence-based crisis prevention program that helps to benefit workers who work with individuals with challenging and crisis behaviors. Nonviolent Crisis Intervention (NCI) training is a combination of preventative strategies and methods that assist staff members who physically intervene in crises, teaching staff de-escalation techniques as well as restrictive and nonrestrictive interventions. Prevalence, with the Crisis Prevention Institute boasting of having trained over 10 million human service professionals in nonviolent crisis intervention (Crisis Prevention Institute, n.d.). Preparing school personnel to prevent and respond to a range of crises is important for safeguarding students, staff, and communities (Nickerson et al., 2019). Initiatives to reduce restrictive behavior management for individuals with ASD, such as staff training, reformed organizational policies, and mindfulness-based interventions, are associated with positive outcomes, including improved safety and decreased long-term costs (Sturmeay, 2018). Nonetheless, restraint is still used in institutional, residential, day habilitation, vocational, and school settings Salvatore et al. (2022).

Student and staff protection, safety, security, and well-being are all words and phrases that are synonymous and equal in value to maintaining one's rights and freedoms from being put in imminent harm, hurt, or danger. Any type of physical intervention should only be used as a

last resort to prevent or stop the imminent harm or threat to injure self or others. To provide behavioral direction, the teacher must have well-designed rules and procedures (usually established at the beginning of the school year) that he or she continually updates and reinforces throughout the year (Marzano 2007). This was imperative when working with certain special populations of students who need constant and consistent reinforcement in the means of behavioral expectations and consequences. The absence of teacher input leaves out the most important variable in the education formula (Marzano, 2003).

Students with autism and intellectual disabilities are at even greater risk of exhibiting severe challenging behavior such as aggression and SIB (Blacher & McIntyre, 2006). This may lead to great emotional, physical, and psychological stress and strain on all parties involved. Educators in self-contained classrooms who have to work with NV/MV secondary students with ASD, have to be mentally, physically, and social-emotionally prepared every day to deal with these circumstances. CPI training provides the de-escalation techniques and behavior management strategies you need to create a culture of safety (Crisis Prevention Institute, n.d.).

Indeed, it's the teacher's job to be on the lookout for potentially volatile situations and deescalate them as quickly as possible (Marzano, 2007). But oftentimes, the teachers and support staff members are unprepared or not fully prepared or capable of physically restraining secondary special education students with disabilities. A percentage of individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities engage in severe, dangerous challenging behaviors (Stevenson et al., 2019). Which can oftentimes lead to student and staff injuries.

Safe, practical, and evidence-based best practices are what all interventions should originate from. CPI employs critical de-escalation methods of non-verbal interventions to combat aggressive behaviors that teach how to decrease the probability of such behaviors from occurring

or occurring to a lesser degree (Stine, 2020). Crisis intervention strategies organize their interventions according to the intensity of an individual's challenging behavior, dividing a student's escalation to and recovery from dangerous behaviors into distinct phases and developing interventions for each phase (Stevenson et al., 2019). Using nonverbal communication was also very important when working with students with disabilities like giving personal space, using safe and non-threatening body language, direct eye contact, inviting facial features, communicating through touch, and having and showing empathy/sympathy towards students. These non-verbal components were essential when emphasizing appropriate forms of de-escalation techniques such as; physical prompts or signaling to hold hands (safe hands), physical guidance and redirection, or physical proximity as used to block hits, kicks, knees, or headbutts. CPI used many of these de-escalation methods as non-verbal interventions that played crucial roles in decreasing assaultive behaviors while supporting student and staff safety in self-contained classroom environments. 90% Reduction in incidents of assault, up to 100% reduction in restraints, 82% reduction in workers' comp claims, we have been changing behaviors and reducing conflict for the well-being of all people (Crisis Prevention Institute, n.d.).

Being able to protect oneself, their students, and other co-workers brings self-confidence, reassurance, and competency when working in an environment where physical aggression and self-injurious behaviors are commonplace in the learning environment. However, such an attempt to prevent or control the aggressive behavior of people with autism may have the opposite of the intended effect, thereby calling for more therapeutic interventions (Jung & Lee, 2020). Many school districts do not consider these extenuating circumstances until a crisis of detrimental disaster happens and the physical aftermath of harm or injuries leaves unanswered questions as to what just happened or what went wrong. Crisis intervention has strengths and

limitations when applied to students with disabilities who exhibit severe challenging behavior (Stevenson et al., 2019). The most dangerous behavior for mentally disabled children is being violent, harming themselves and others, disturbing behavior, and inability to establish acceptable social relations with peers (Wahsheh, 2019). Along with safety problems in the classroom are other outside barriers and influences that makes the implementation process slow and tedious. However, numerous barriers to implementing function-based treatment may exist, including a lack of resources, time, provider knowledge, and interdisciplinary collaboration, and concern with insurance reimbursement (Mazurek et al., 2020).

Reiterating Skinner's behaviorism theory led to future literary works and studies being replicated to produce similar studies aimed at producing or advancing human behaviors to a greater degree of effectiveness. Safety and well-being are always at the forefront when it comes to educating our students with special needs and educators in a learning environment. One study reported that a majority of restrained patients were perceived as a danger to self or others (60.6%) or non-compliant or unwilling to follow directions 28.1%; Wong et al., (2019). When dealing with extreme target behaviors, and a population of students with unique disabilities and disorders like physical aggression, SIB, and ASD; finding suitable positive interventions aimed at decreasing behaviors was a constant need when trying to prevent harm or injury to self or others. It may be unrealistic to expect practitioners without extensive training in behavior analysis (e.g., special education teachers, paraprofessionals) to be able to implement these strategies with fidelity, even though in practice they are regularly tasked with serving these individuals (Stevenson et al., 2019). All are important key factors when including children with disabilities.

Summary

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD; DSM 5), a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by social communication/interaction impairment and restricted/repetitive behaviors, interests, or activities (American Psychiatric Association, APA, 2013), is estimated to occur in 1 in 54 people (U.S.; Maenner et al., 2020). Research is still learning and improving in knowledge and understanding with more studies being conducted describing special education staff members' perception of the effectiveness of using multiple non-verbal interventions simultaneously to decrease physical aggression and SIB behaviors in NV/MV secondary special education students with autism in a self-contained classroom. In addition, SIB can limit access to regular educational opportunities, often requiring a restricted educational environment and increased staff support to manage the behavior (McGlade & Robinson, 2021).

Historically, there was little research identified on the implementation of three multiple forms of non-verbal interventions relationship building, facial affect, and crisis prevention intervention training applied simultaneously to this unique population of students to decrease or eliminate dangerous and assaultive behaviors. These are components of interventions that may need further development for older minimally verbal children with ASD (Tager-Flusberg et al., 2017). Researchers have investigated specific types of antecedents and consequences that trigger and later maintain behaviors, and have found that these typically can be attributed to the actions of other people in the vicinity (Edelson, 2022). This growing phenomenon continues to leave significant gaps in the literature worthy of being researched and investigated in greater detail. Though numerous population-based studies have examined the prevalence of SIB in children with developmental disabilities, data specific to ASD are lacking (Soke et al., 2016). Studies are needed that would fill the gaps in our knowledge about how these technologies might be used

most effectively and what the limits might be for implementing interventions on these platforms for this population (Tager-Flusberg et al., 2017).

Based on Skinner's theory of behaviorism more practical, social, and theoretical applications are still needed to find more effective and efficient interventions and strategies to decrease or eliminate challenging and dangerous behaviors from students in self-contained specialized classrooms. There are serious health consequences that may result from SIB including fractures, concussions, lacerations, contusions, and other injuries that may lead to hospitalizations or even death (Soke et al., 2016). All of these behaviors vary in frequency, duration, and severity across the autism spectrum (Edelson, 2022). Without effective forms of non-verbal interventions and the necessary training applied in these classrooms, educators' worthwhile attempts to safely manage and control their classrooms and students fall short. These accumulating environmental obstacles lead to difficulties in the daily lives of included students with ASD and may compromise the quality and the continuity of their schooling (Mazon et al., 2022). It was, therefore, imperative that special educators be trained to successfully and effectively implement these multiple forms of non-verbal interventions simultaneously to ultimately help improve students' overall well-being regarding their significance in life, future productivity, and individual contributions to society.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this single intrinsic case study was to describe the experiences of using multiple forms of non-verbal interventions to decrease physical aggression and self-injurious behaviors for special education staff members in self-contained classrooms in Behaviorville ISD. The methods section provided a comprehensive and detailed examination of the chosen research method, design, and type along with the research questions, participants and settings, researcher role, recruitment plans, and procedures while categorizing the data analysis plans for this research study. Data collection methods used were an online survey, in-depth individual interviews, and focus group discussions that can be procedurally implemented and replicated for future research studies. In order to analyze data, there were several procedures that needed to be followed. These included gathering and collecting the data, organizing and reviewing it, developing and assigning codes to the themes and patterns found in the data, analyzing the coded data, and finally reporting on the findings and implications of the data analysis. By following these steps, it produced triangulation and increase our knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. In conclusion, when assessing trustworthiness, it is important to consider credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and ethical considerations, and provide a summary of all these factors.

Research Design

When researchers are trying to best answer the “why” of a research question, a qualitative intrinsic case study design was selected for this proposed study to examine and explore special educators’ staff members perspectives on the effectiveness of using multiple forms of non-verbal interventions simultaneously. According to Özdemir and Kılıç (2023) it was important to explore

special education teachers' views on teaching since they face a wide range of challenges. In qualitative research, a case study is a research method that collects data through interviews, observations, documents, audio- or video-recordings, and journals, focusing on a single participant or multiple participants to explore an issue within a certain situation or context (Creswell 2007). The proposed research study utilized online surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions session via zoom meetings to answer the research questions at hand, thus giving revealing vital knowledge and understanding to the phenomenon.

According to Yin (2014), qualitative research involves studying the meaning of people's lives, as experienced under real-world conditions. This was essential when framing a study that was lived and seen through the lenses of the individual participants. Capturing their perspective may be a major purpose of a qualitative study (Yin, 2014). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), a qualitative case study can be composed to illustrate a unique case, a case that has an unusual interest in and of itself and needs to be described in detail. Staff members who are there first-hand to describe, observe, document, and discuss their perceptions of the phenomena are vital to the credibility and reliability of the study. Stake (1995) argued that researchers can generalize the results of their case into the future and across other settings. A qualitative case study was appropriate as this study intended to understand a specific issue with regards to the phenomenon being studied.

Case study research is a comprehensive method that incorporates multiple sources of data to provide detailed accounts of complex research phenomena in real-life contexts (Morgan et al., 2017). The case study approach uses a set criterion, for instance, Creswell and Poth (2018) use a case study to examine a case, bound in time or place, and look for contextual material about the setting of the case. The case study approach allowed researchers to describe or explore in greater

detail a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied in individuals or a group of participants (cases). Exploring the perceptions of school personnel within the natural or place of practice is important because direct behavior or experiences can be observed and noted (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

An intrinsic case study design was chosen as the most appropriate design to address the research study's aim and question (Tuohy et al., 2021). A single intrinsic case study design was selected with the intent of increasing our understanding of a case of particular interest (Neal-Boylan, 2019). Based on a self-contained setting and conducted during a specified time during the school year, this intrinsic single case study best fits the criteria for this research study. The intrinsic case study design focuses on a case because it is of interest in its own right; in other words, the case is "intrinsically" interesting (Stake, 1995). The unknown safety and risk factors that affect educators and students who are impacted physically and emotionally due to physical aggression and self-injurious behaviors are and in itself a unique phenomenon that needs to be studied (Spinazzola et al., 2014).

A single intrinsic case study design was used to provide a rich and detailed description of the complex phenomenon being studied from the perspectives of those involved. While conducting research, it is vital to try and focus on what can be learned and understood in the case, concerning the essential fundamental issues regarding the why, and its importance (Newhart & Patten, 2023). According to Stake (2000), an intrinsic case study refers to an examination of a specific case, situation, or context driven by a researcher's genuine interest or curiosity. In utilizing Stake's single intrinsic case study design, the researcher magnified and highlighted the central dynamics and awareness of the why and makes known its importance.

Therefore, we have an intrinsic interest in the case, and we may call our work an intrinsic case study (Stake, 1995).

Research Questions

Central Research Question

What are special education staff members' experiences of using multiple forms of non-verbal interventions simultaneously to decrease physical aggression and self-injurious behaviors in self-contained classrooms?

Sub-Question One

Which non-verbal interventions do special education staff find most effective for non-verbal or minimally verbal students with ASD, physical aggression, and SIB in self-contained classrooms?

Sub-Question Two

How prepared do secondary special education staff members feel they are at utilizing non-verbal interventions in the self-contained classroom?

Settings and Participants

All the participants that were invited to participate in this voluntary research study were current or past full-time employees of the school district, all lived centrally located within or around the county by which the school district resides, and all have worked or volunteered in some form or capacity with non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with physical aggression, self-injurious behaviors (SIB), and autism spectrum disorder (ASD). In addition, recruiting nationally from various settings using traditional methods can be time-consuming (Marks et al., 2017).

Setting

IRB approval was granted, the research study was conducted in Behaviorville ISD located in North Texas. On BISSD's campuses are where the programs for non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with autism (ASD), physical aggression, and self-injurious behaviors (SIB) towards self or others are located. The program name is officially called Teachers & Extraordinary Assistants Mentoring Students (T.E.A.M.S). A crucial component of successful access is for the researcher to make contact and build and sustain a relationship with key individuals inside the desired location of research (Amundsen et al., 2017).

All campus staff members including the administration, special education department, auxiliary, and itinerant staff members were employed or former employees of BISSD. BISSD is a traditional high school located in North Texas and BISSD's campuses proudly serve a large portion of rural, urban, and suburban areas. The district serves approximately 23,576 students in grades EE (Early Education) through 12, of which 44% are Hispanic, 38% White, 9% Black/African American, 5% Asian, and 4% of other races.

The organizational structure in BISSD is under the direct leadership and supervision of the Board of Directors, Superintendent, and the Superintends Cabinet members. The site and program T.E.A.M.S. within the Structured Environment to Enhance Communication (SEEC) program were specifically chosen for the number of specialized autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and applied behavior analysis (ABA) philosophies and intensive behavioral management programs of support provided for secondary students with ASD. This means that the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and the central phenomenon in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Participants

When people perceive themselves as being relevant contributors, they are more motivated to participate in research (Woith et al., 2014; Kristensen and Ravn, 2015). Participants were selected using a purposive sampling approach. Purposive sampling was deemed appropriate to invite participants as it allowed for the selection of participants who exhibited the characteristics that were important and useful for the study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013), that is, they were teachers of children with special needs. Participants were contacted through purposive sampling via emails/phone calls. Participants who showed a willingness to participate and meet the study criteria were invited to participate. The present study aimed to use qualitative methods to explore the perspectives of teachers from both mainstream and specialist settings, regarding the main challenges they face and strategies they implement (Cook & Ogden, 2022).

Participants in this study were selected based on the inclusion criteria. Inclusion criteria include teachers and staff members who worked as current or past special education teachers, special education assistants, behavior facilitators (BFs), board-certified behavior analysts (BCBAs), administrators, and special education coordinators. Additionally, participants have all worked with and have prior knowledge and experience with non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with ASD who have exhibited physical aggression and SIB towards themselves or others. We defined non-verbal as speaking no words and minimally verbal as speaking fewer than 100 words with no phrase speech (McKinney et al., 2021). Participants enter research voluntarily, with an understanding of what their participation entails (Xu et al., 2020). Participants were current or former special education staff members and their ages range from 21 and over. The number of participants selected were 10.

Researcher Positionality

In this study, I wanted to address some major issues and concerns that I had regarding teachers and staff not “effectively” being able to implement multiply forms of non-verbal interventions simultaneously, with fidelity. The teacher is one of the essential elements of this system (Kaleli, 2021; Tanguay & Many, 2022). This was due to the lack of educator knowledge and trainings with regards to using these forms of interventions “positive relationship building, facial affect recognition, and crisis prevention training” in self-contained classroom. The lack of appropriate trainings, experiences, and knowledge hampered special education staff members abilities to be effective in this type of learning environment for years. Individuals who will practice the teaching profession, which is considered a sacred profession, must be competent in applying the knowledge and skills they have gained (Vosough, 2023).

Despite these strides, there remains no recommended intervention for this group, and large-scale multi-site randomized controlled trials (RCTs) have been few (Brignell et al., 2018; Koegel et al., 2020). These issues and concerns ultimately puts our NV/MV secondary students with ASD who demonstrates physical aggression, and SIB, against self or others at a huge learning and safety disadvantage in self-contained educational settings. School districts, special education programs, and even higher learning institutes are not properly preparing special educators with the necessary training opportunities, various areas of specialty in classroom training, and advanced knowledge and safety measures that provides effective intervention while working with this unique, but sometimes dangerous population of students. These children’s difficulties, and interventions to remediate them, remain under-researched overall (Russell et al., 2019).

This research study allowed me to expand the literature regarding using multiply forms of non-verbal interventions simultaneously, that were aimed at significantly decreasing crisis and harmful behaviors against staff and students in self-contained classrooms across America. Creating a safer more positive learning environment for both students and staff, providing various non-verbal communication skills and tools are the main concerns and areas of improvement that are associated with the researcher's personal and professional moral values, knowledge, and experiences. This study allowed me to further develop and use multiple forms of non-verbal intervention methods and strategies simultaneously to help resolve many forms of behavioral conflict between educators, students, parents, and outside agencies. Researchers' values and understandings hold ethical meanings for how subjects are represented (Pope & Patterson, 2019).

To better understand students' aggressive and self-injurious behaviors, educators should also be able to understand student disabilities; and sometimes multiple means or methods of interventions and strategies are the best way to acknowledge this phenomenon. According to Simó-Pinatella et al. (2021) a wealth of scientific evidence supports the idea that children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) tends to engage in challenging behaviors (CBs). Without adequate and effective multiple interventions applied together physical aggression and SIB will continue to be a part of the ongoing problem concerning student and staff safety.

Interpretive Framework

B.F. Skinner's Theory of Behaviorism assumes that all learning occurs through interactions with the environment and the environment shapes behavior. The tremendous impact Skinner's effective and progressive theory of behavior has had on everyday human affairs provides evidence of its cogency and soundness (Vargas, 2017). The selected pragmatism

paradigm used multiple methods of interventions and how each of these interactions affects and impacts student behavior, which allowed the researcher to find appropriate answers to the research questions. Pragmatism is not committed to any one system of philosophy and reality (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The major problems facing the world today can be solved only if we improve our understanding of human behavior (Skinner, 1976).

Philosophical Assumptions

Philosophical assumptions of any researcher start with their own perceived experiences and ideals that they have amassed over one's lifetime. Their unique value systems associated with their moral, ethical, spiritual, cultural, educational, political, social-emotional, economical geographical status all stem from years of their own viewed through their world lens. According to Creswell and Poth (2018) how we formulate our problem and research questions to study is shaped by our assumptions, and in turn, influences how we seek information to answer the questions.

Ontological Assumption

Ontological assumptions were chosen for this study based on religious reality themes and the belief in one true reality. These ontological assumptions were summed up in the researcher's unwavering and faithful trust in God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Researcher beliefs align with the true reality and that reality is based on and characterized by sound biblical principles and doctrines. In Colossians 3:23 (King James Bible, 1769/2017), "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men." Some researchers have shared multiple views or just one realistic viewpoint as it relates to nature and its surroundings. Different researchers embrace different realities, as do the individuals being studied and the readers of a qualitative study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Epistemological Assumption

The epistemological assumption in a qualitative study assumes that researchers get as close as possible to the participants. This means talking personally, professionally, and openly about the stigma that surrounds physical aggression, self-injurious behaviors, autism, and special education. Sharing personal and professional stories and dialogues without judgments or self-biases opens up the floodgates of honesty and just being human and vulnerable. Therefore, subjective evidence is assembled based on individual views (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Having multiple participants who are not all experts share viewpoints and perceptions of the phenomenon being studied brought lived experiences and knowledge to others in the educational field, which reflects on us all as just being human, and not perfect, in our pursuits of excellence.

Axiological Assumption

Axiological assumption assumes that the researcher brings their own personal and professional values and beliefs, in addition to prior educational knowledge and experiences into the study. The researcher fifty-six-year-old male, African American, with post-graduate degrees, and a Christian believer who had almost thirty years of experience working with students in special and regular education (K12); who had prior knowledge and experience working with target behaviors of physical aggression and self-injurious behaviors (SIB), including non-verbal/minimally verbal students with and without autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The researcher believed in the safety and well-being of others. According to Creswell & Poth (2018), this is the axiological assumption that characterizes qualitative research. The researcher's axiological views and histories were, therefore, based on prior education, personal and

professional knowledge, experiences, and expertise that were a part of his life before the potential research study and shares no known affiliations or biases towards the study.

Researcher's Role

The role of the researcher was to perform the research study with integrity, objectively, and done with fidelity without researcher bias. This problem of bias stems, in part, from the fact that, in qualitative studies, researchers, themselves, are often the primary—and, in some cases, the only—research instrument (Jones & Donmoyer, 2021). There was no monetary exchange for participants or researchers in this research study. I served as one of the 10 district special education behavior facilitators for BISD where the prospective participants work. I currently provided behavioral support and services to special education students in the same district. My educational background and knowledge, experiences and training, and certifications were in areas of curriculum and instruction, applied behavior analysis, specialized classroom management, and crisis prevention intervention.

My goals were to better understand students' aggressive and self-injurious behaviors, prepare educators to better understand student disabilities, and make better decisions in unbiased ways without personal assumptions about understanding this phenomenon of crisis and challenging behaviors. I understood that was the responsibility of the researcher to conduct such research without undue biases and influences and with integrity. The researcher had no personal or professional influence on participants or programs, the researcher's work was based solely on the academic, social-emotional, behavioral, and life/social skills benefit of the students.

Researcher bias included being in a behavioral capacity for numerous years and working with physical aggression, self-injurious behaviors, and autism; other educators in the same specialized field should have more prior knowledge, sufficient understanding, and more in-depth

training opportunities in dealing with said phenomena and population of students. Researcher biases also included other staff members' lack of experience and expertise in said field of physical aggression, self-injurious behaviors, and autism; but who extensively relied on their decision-making processes based on said limited knowledge, education, and training. The researcher concluded that the data collection methods and analysis plans were not influenced, developed, or assessed unjustly due to the researcher's role and responsibilities regarding the study. Pseudonyms were used in the researcher's study to protect participants' privacy.

Procedures

Before the current study took place, the participating school district, school employees, and Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved it. This was done in the form of emails or written documents that were time-stamped for procedural safeguards. Following this, the next step was recruiting participants for the study using the inclusion criteria and purposive sampling approach discussed above. After recruitment, consent was obtained from the respondents, which included discussing risk factors, benefits, and making sure that respondents are fully aware of their rights. Procedures for withdrawing from the study, protection of study data, the confidentiality of individual names and records, and contact information regarding study questions or concerns were also explained.

Data collection methods for this study were in the form of online surveys, individual interviews (in-person or zoom), and focus group discussion (in-person or zoom) questions. The first approach of data collection for this study were open-ended survey questions that were conducted with participants in the following manner. The researcher sent out the surveys via email formats and the emails contained detailed information as to how to read and answer each question on the survey. The survey questions were designed to elicit detailed, one-of-a-kind

responses that were analyzed for recurrent patterns. And lastly, each participant was allowed a timely manner of two weeks to fully respond to and send the open-ended responses back to the researcher. The next data collection method were open-ended interview questions that allow in-depth analysis of the research subjects. All participants were interviewed by open-ended interview questions. The interviews were conducted in person or via Zoom, allowing a more in-depth assessment of the participants' viewpoints and experiences. The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for reoccurring themes with the participants' agreement.

Focus groups were the third form of data collection. All participants were offered the opportunity to be in the focus group discussion, hoping to add diverse responses to the online survey and interview questions. Focus groups were conducted in person or via Zoom, allowing a group discussion to dive into the participants' perspectives and experiences. The focus groups were audio-recorded with the participant's agreement, and the transcriptions and themes were reviewed. The data analysis plan used descriptive statistical methods for analyzing, assessing, and coding the data through interobserver agreement by the researcher and another independent investigator, to ensure inter-coder reliability and triangulation of the three methods obtained.

Permissions

Both the school district where the research was conducted and Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) obtained ethical approval for the current study. The first step in securing permission was to submit to the school district a detailed letter outlining the research study and its purpose (Appendix G). The IRB approval process began as soon as the district granted permission. In addition, each prospective faculty participant was emailed and requested to sign a permission form stating their desire to participate. IRB approval letters and site permission were then submitted as appendices to the final research report (Appendix A). These

safeguards ensure that the study meets all ethical requirements and that the participants' confidentiality and privacy were always protected.

Recruitment Plan

The recruitment plan was that all potential participants in this study has worked at a school district in Texas, been special education teachers, special education assistants, behavior facilitators (BFs), board-certified behavior analysts (BCBAs), administrators, or special education coordinators. Participants were both male and female and their ages range from 21 and over. The number of participants were 10. Because qualitative studies can attend to the contextual richness of these settings, your research enables you to study the everyday lives of many kinds of people and what they think about, them under many different circumstances (Yin, 2016). The sample pool consisted of school district employees who met specific criteria: full-time employees, held a position in the district working with secondary special education, had a minimum experience of 1 or more years in their position, and had minimum education required of at least a high school diploma. Participants all worked with and had prior knowledge and experience with non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students grades 6-12 with ASD who had exhibited physical aggression and SIB towards themselves or others in their natural settings. According to Yin (2016), one response is that you would like to understand how people cope in their real-world settings.

The selected sampling of participants was purposeful. Based on the researcher's certain criteria for selecting participants having had a rich knowledge and wealth of information for the research study; purposive sampling was selected based on this population's ability to provide vital and readily available information. Purposive sampling refers to selecting research participants who can speak to the research aims and who have knowledge and experience of the

phenomenon under scrutiny (Ritchie et al., 2013). The rationale for the sample selection of these participants in this study was to provide greater detail and in-depth real-world knowledge and experiences by educators who had lived experiences and perceptions with this target population of students. Equally important, you may want to portray real-world events from the participants' perspectives (Yin, 2016). Consent forms were sent out to the participants who had elected to participate in this voluntary research study under the following consent form terms (Appendix C).

Data Collection Plan

There are several quality methods of acquiring data collection in qualitative research studies. Online surveys, in-person or zoom meeting individual interviews, and in-person or zoom meeting focus group discussion session were chosen as my main three methods of data collection for this single intrinsic case study regarding physical aggression and self-injurious behaviors towards self or others by non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with autism in a self-contained classroom. These data collection approaches were the best and most accurate fit for the proposed research study to ensure trustworthiness regarding credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Survey

The online survey approach provided convenience in several ways. Participants answered at their own pace. This strategy provided participants with a discreet and private way to respond (Ravet, 2018). A key advantage of online qualitative surveys was openness and flexibility to address a wide range of research questions of interest to social researchers, as the method allows access to data that range in focus from peoples' views, experiences, or material practices,

through to representational or meaning-making practices (Braun et al., 2021). This gave participants easy online access and autonomy to freely answer the study questions.

The first approach to data collection for this study was an online survey that allowed private and confidential responses from participants in the privacy of their private choosing, thus allowing for a more relaxed and secluded environment. The survey consisted of several open-ended questions based on participants' knowledge and experiences. The online survey should have taken less than 15 minutes to complete. Each participant's assigned pseudonym was safeguarded for identification and privacy. For protection and privacy concerns each participant received an email identifying them by pseudonyms only as Educator #1, #2, #3, etc. Collected, reviewed, and organized the data, then analyzed the data for specific themes and patterns. Described and coded the data, then identified and placed the codes into groups, and finally presented the results based on meaning and understanding of the findings. The whole purpose of coding, and of linking coding to theory, is to build and inform interpretation and understanding (May et al., 2022).

The survey questions were designed to elicit detailed, one-of-a-kind responses that were analyzed for recurrent patterns. And lastly, each participant was allowed a timely manner of two weeks to fully respond to and send their open-ended responses back to the researcher. These survey questions were used to solicit unbiased and genuine responses that hopefully provided future knowledge and better understanding in research studies; to attempt to prevent, decrease, or stop physical aggression, and SIBs, from NV/MV secondary special education students with ASD in self-contained classroom environments.

Table 1*Survey Questions*

1. Please explain the effectiveness of special educators who use multiple forms of non-verbal interventions simultaneously in a self-contained classroom environment. CRQ
2. Please explain how the teacher/student relationship can be effective in a self-contained classroom environment. SQ1
3. Please explain how facial affect recognition training can be effective in a self-contained classroom environment. SQ1
4. Please explain how crisis prevention intervention training can be effective in a self-contained classroom environment. SQ1
5. How frequently do you utilize various forms of non-verbal interventions in a self-contained classroom setting?
6. How easy is it for you to use these multiple forms of non-verbal interventions in a self-contained classroom environment? SQ2
7. How likely are you to recommend using these multiple forms of non-verbal interventions in a self-contained classroom environment to other colleagues? SQ2

Q1 allowed participants in a self-contained classroom environment to discuss in detail their overall satisfaction with regards to using multiple forms of non-verbal interventions simultaneously, i.e., positive relationship building, facial affect recognition, and crisis prevention intervention training to decrease physical aggression and self-injurious behaviors in non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with autism. Q2 through Q4 elicited participants' unbiased responses concerning the effectiveness versus non-effectiveness of using multiple forms of non-verbal forms of interventions. Finally, Q5 through Q7 evoked the

participants' detailed responses on how their perceptions are acknowledged through the usage of multiple forms of non-verbal interventions simultaneously. Due to many participants' lack of additional time, availability, and planning, online surveys were more readily available to participants, thus allowing researchers and participants to take advantage of this form of data collection.

Survey Data Analyses Plan

The online survey data analysis plan used a Thematic Analysis (TA). Thematic analysis is a simple and easy-to-learn method that anyone can use to extract meaningful themes from their data, whether manually or through automation (Lin et al., 2022). Thematic analysis is a systematic and flexible approach for analyzing qualitative data. It is useful for generating valuable insights and organizing data to provide context. The thematic analysis allowed us to identify, analyze, and organize themes within our dataset and capture and compare opinions and experiences from various students across the data sources (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

These significant comparisons will then be probed to determine how the groups differed (Gansle et al., 2022). The responses were then evaluated based on emerging themes and subthemes ranging from overall effectiveness and then categorized, as such, based on these outcomes. Then all the responses were analyzed and manually coded. Developed themes and sub-themes emerged and were then divided into categories based on the research questions. The coding process allows for the interpretation of large segments of text and portions of information in new ways (Belotto, 2018). Traditionally, researchers had to create codes manually by writing them down on pen and paper (Maher et al., 2018). With the additions of CAQDAS software this allows for easy data uploading and direct creation of codes. This allows you to conveniently

filter your data by code, making it simpler to review your codes and evaluate your findings (Raudvere et al., 2019).

Individual Interviews

The study herein used individual interviews as the second data collection strategy. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), individual interviews allow one-on-one personal interactions between the interviewee and interviewer. According to Matowe (2019) semi-structured interviews, are utilized in this case study, which draws on aspects of descriptive research that allow a comprehensive summary of events in everyday terms, and allow for an in-depth exploration of a specific phenomenon. Interviews were conducted with participants in a manner that is conducive to qualitative data collection methods.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018) at the beginning of the interview, review the purpose of the study, the amount of time that will be needed to complete the study, their right to withdraw from the study, and the plans for using the results from the interview (offer a copy of the report or an abstract of it to the interviewee). After clarification of the interview process is thoroughly understood, in-person or zoom meeting interviews were conducted where both interviewee and interviewer will be physically located or via zoom in the same room at the established and agreed upon time, place, and date. The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for reoccurring themes with the participants' agreement.

Table 2

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please describe your educational background and career through your current position.

CRQ

2. How do you feel personally and professionally about working with non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) whose target behaviors are physical aggression and SIB towards self or others? SQ1
3. How would you feel if a non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education student with ASD physically assaulted you in the classroom? SQ1
4. How would you assist someone who has been physically assaulted in the classroom by a non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education student with ASD? SQ1
5. How would you describe your challenges when working with non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with ASD? SQ2
6. How would you describe successful practices you use when working with non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with ASD? SQ1
7. How would professional development experiences help you prepare to work with non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with ASD? SQ1
8. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences with non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with ASD, that we haven't discussed? SQ1
9. How would you describe your challenges when working with students with non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with physical aggression in your classes? SQ2
10. How would you describe successful practices you use when working with non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with physical aggression in your classes? SQ2

11. How would professional development experiences help you prepare to work with non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with physical aggression?
SQ2
12. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences with non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with physical aggression that we haven't discussed? SQ2
13. How would you describe your challenges when working with non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with self-injurious behaviors (SIB) in your classes? SQ2
14. How would you describe successful practices you use when working with non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with SIB in your classes?
SQ2
15. How do professional development experiences help prepare you to work with non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with SIB? SQ1
16. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences with non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with SIB that we haven't discussed? SQ1
17. How would you describe your experiences of other special educators who use non-verbal interventions simultaneously i.e. relationship building, facial affect recognition, and crisis intervention prevention with non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with ASD, physical aggression, and SIB? SQ2
18. What else would you like to add to our discussion of other special educators' experiences who use non-verbal interventions simultaneously i.e. relationship building, facial affect

recognition, and crisis intervention prevention with non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with ASD, physical aggression, and SIB students that we haven't discussed? SQ1

Q1 sought to grasp the perspectives of special education staff members involved in teaching and caring for nonverbal/minimally verbal secondary special education children with autism. Staff members' educational backgrounds and professional experiences may shed light on how their knowledge and expertise inform their perceptions of the efficacy of several nonverbal interventions concurrently to reduce physical aggression and self-injurious behaviors toward oneself or others. It is critical to understand how special education staff members perceive the use of nonverbal treatments to regulate problematic behaviors among nonverbal/minimally verbal kids with autism in a self-contained classroom environment, which is the overarching purpose of the research.

The painstakingly constructed interview questions Q2 through Q5 and Q13 covered the intended behaviors for the research as well as the challenges that come with working with this particular group. The questions also dive into the personal and professional experiences of the staff members, illuminating the motivating factors that led them to pursue this line of work as well as the level of commitment that they have to assist autistic students. By investigating the perspectives held by staff members, the study endeavors to provide a clearer understanding of how non-verbal remedies may be applied to remedy the aforementioned behaviors.

Questions Q6–Q8 allowed participants to describe their views and approaches for reducing physical aggression and self-harming behaviors towards themselves or others. These queries helped staff members better understand the education and support required to work with autistic senior special education students who are nonverbal or barely speaking. These queries

comprehensively summarized the participants' experiences, routines, and needs in dealing with nonverbal or barely speaking secondary special education students with autism in a self-contained environment. With these questions, the researcher aimed to understand the staff members' approaches and how they might be improved to serve this group of students better.

The interview questions Q9-Q12 were designed to elicit detailed, qualitative information on how special education staff members assess the obstacles they encounter and the helpful techniques used when working with these students. Furthermore, the interview questions focused on how staff members in special education may be better prepared to deal with individuals of this type due to opportunities for professional growth. The interview questions aided in providing a comprehensive understanding of special education staff members' experiences working with physically aggressive secondary special education students who are nonverbal or minimally verbal, as well as the efficacy of various nonverbal interventions on these behaviors.

The goal of Q14 and Q15 investigated successful tactics and how staff members were prepared to connect with these students via professional development opportunities. These investigations underscored the need for ongoing staff training, support, and strategies to reduce physical aggression and SIB. Staff members provided additional information they consider relevant to the discussion by responding to open-ended Q16 and Q18. These questions aimed to learn more about staff members' experiences, perspectives, and insights in dealing with nonverbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with ASD, physical violence, and SIB. In Q17, staff members addressed their encounters with other exceptional educators who used nonverbal strategies simultaneously, such as relationship development, emotion recognition, and crisis prevention. Understanding effective therapies will be simpler if standard practices can be identified and highlight any differences in approach. Overall, these interview

questions were intended to offer staff members a detailed awareness of their experiences dealing with physically violent and SIB secondary special education students and a thorough comprehension of how to assist these people.

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

The interviews were analyzed with conventional thematic analysis, which is a method for identifying, analyzing and interpreting patterns of meaning (or ‘themes’) within qualitative data (Clarke & Braun, 2017). New options in Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) such as NVivo, Atlas. ti and MAXQDA give qualitative researchers the option to forgo audio-to-text transcription altogether, and instead engage in live coding of audio or video files. Thematic analysis involves digging deep into the thoughts, motivations, and ideas behind your data, by identifying and analyzing themes (Cooper et al., 2021). Transcription is a notoriously time-consuming and often tedious task which can take between three hours and over eight hours to transcribe one hour of audio, depending on typing speed (McMullin, 2023). Using the NVivo software the first author will isolate significant statements in the data, giving equal attention to all data contained in the interviews (Sulek et al., 2021). These applications provided unique capabilities like the capability to listen to the audio while concurrently looking for errors. Then all the questions were analyzed and manually coded, developed themes and sub-themes emerged, and then divided into categories based on the research questions. In addition, the data will be further analyzed and coded using NVivo software to extract common themes, and findings, and to ensure a theme was not overlooked during the manual coding process (Maher et al., 2018).

Focus Group Discussion

A representative subset of the interviewees was requested to engage in a 45–60-minute focus group discussion session via zoom meeting to conduct the focus group discussions. Participants were carefully chosen based on their demographics and shared experiences with the study's topic. A competent facilitator moderated the focus group, managing the discussion and ensuring that all relevant subjects were covered. A moderator's guide was produced before the focus group to help lead the discussion and keep it on track. The instruction manual included several open-ended questions, which explored and developed in the group. The focus group was conducted in a relaxed setting to encourage open dialogue among members. The makeup of the focus group was carefully examined to ensure that the discussion is successful. The researcher evaluated the influences of the subgroup mix and attempted to build a group with comparable experiences or perspectives on the study problem. All group members were encouraged to engage, and the facilitator created an environment where individuals could freely share their thoughts and experiences. Focus group discussions, allowed for group interactions and dialogues from a certain demographic of participants, that was an important data source for the research topic. This strategy combined with the other two methodological procedures developed triangulation among sources and provided a full understanding of the research subject.

Table 3

Focus Group Questions

1. What target behaviors are deemed most dangerous and an immediate safety risk for staff/peers in a self-contained classroom environment? CRQ
2. What type of staff member characteristics would be more effective in working with this population of students in a self-contained classroom environment? SQ1

3. CPI is a non-violent intervention method that is only used as a last resort to keep students safe. What are some pros and cons of implementing CPI? SQ2
4. What strategies have you found to be most effective in minimizing troublesome behavior in the classroom? SQ2
5. How can educators assist students in developing the required social and emotional skills? SQ2
6. In your perspective, what are some of the challenges of using positive behavior support approaches in a self-contained classroom? SQ1
7. Please detail a time when you had to intervene to avert a potentially dangerous situation. What were your strategies? SQ2
8. Which training or professional development would you want to pursue to better assist students in the classroom who demonstrate challenging behaviors? SQ1
9. Of all the topics we covered today, which do you feel were most relevant? CRQ
10. Is there anything that you feel is important that we missed when talking about these topics? CRQ

Q1 allowed participants in a self-contained classroom environment to submit thoughts on the riskiest behaviors that instantly imperil the safety of staff and other kids. This understanding helped develop effective therapies to minimize such behaviors. To engage more effectively with this student group, staff members must possess particular characteristics, which Q2 sought to identify. The responses to this question provided insight into the kind of staff members needed to help these students appropriately. Q3 investigated the use of CPI as a non-violent intervention approach, as well as its pros and limitations, and evaluated the usefulness of this intervention technique. Participants analyzed the topics raised during the interview in Q4 and chose the most

pertinent ones, providing insight into which areas needed future in-depth examination. Finally, Q5 allowed participants to provide any additional information they believed was important but should have been addressed during the interview. The overarching goal of these interview questions were to elicit rich, in-depth responses that provided a thorough understanding of the effectiveness of various nonverbal interventions in reducing physical aggression and self-harming behaviors in secondary special education students with autism.

The goal of Q6 looked at the most effective approaches to reducing disruptive behavior in the classroom. If this question was answered, the researcher was able to determine the particular nonverbal treatments that special education staff members have employed to address physical aggressiveness and self-injurious behaviors by nonverbal/minimally verbal secondary autistic kids enrolled in special education. Q7 solicited participants' thoughts on how instructors might assist students in developing the required social and emotional skills. The researcher was able to determine the specific social and emotional qualities that special education staff members feel are critical for students to develop if this question is answered. The goal of Q8 looked at special education staff members' challenges while employing positive behavior support tactics in a self-contained classroom. The answer to this question enabled the researcher to zero in on the specific difficulties that need attention to optimize the efficacy of positive behavior support approaches in this setting. Q9 requested precise details about a moment when special education staff members had to intervene to avert a potentially hazardous occurrence. The response to this question assisted the researcher in identifying the specific nonverbal behaviors that the staff members used to regulate the situation. According to question 10, special education staff members pursued training or professional development to help kids who demonstrate troublesome behaviors in the classroom. By answering this question, the researcher was able to

identify the specific areas that need professional development or training to increase the effectiveness of nonverbal therapies for challenging classroom behaviors.

Focus Group Data Analysis

Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) was used to identify patterns in the data and capture commonalities. The focus group data analysis plan relied on Thematic analysis along with new technological options available like Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) such as NVivo, Atlas. ti and MAXQDA. Thematic analysis is a versatile method that can be applied to various data types, sample sizes, and research questions (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Transcription is a notoriously time-consuming and often tedious task which can take between three hours and over eight hours to transcribe one hour of audio, depending on typing speed (McMullin, 2023).

In this study, NVivo was the focus group discussion method of utilizing data collection to thoroughly appreciate the participants' experiences and perspectives on the research subjects. Participants transcriptions were prepared and data was collected on educators' perceptions of the research study. This information was then analyzed thematically using NVivo. Overviewing themes and sub-themes were then acknowledged from the chart presented through NVivo. Following transcription, the data was evaluated using a combination of human coding and the qualitative data analysis application NVivo employed to help find new themes and patterns.

For coding purposes, the data was separated into smaller segments, and each segment was assigned a code based on the relevance and applicability of the research questions. The codes were then sorted and organized into categories to discover overarching themes and patterns in the data. The researcher also took notes during the focus group discussion to help with the analysis process. When the coding procedure was completed, participant cross-case

analysis was used to investigate similarities and differences in the data. It is vital to compare the responses of the different participants to uncover parallels and differences in their opinions and experiences. Looking at the data in this way, the study may give a complete understanding of the research issues.

Data Synthesis

Thematic synthesis uses the well-established qualitative research technique of thematic analysis to inductively identify themes and abstract across published qualitative studies (Crowe et al., 2023). The Thematic analysis was mainly inductive in nature and followed the procedure outlined by (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Qualitative Data Analysis Software (QDAS) such as NVivo was utilized once all three data analysis approaches have been articulated together and prepared. The data synthesis approach used NVivo software to ensure a coherent body of information that identifies themes and answers the study objectives.

NVivo used on all three approaches, the researcher was able to generate a single collection of themes from the whole body of data. Instead of multiple team members doing in-depth qualitative data analysis, large datasets are frequently handled using QDAS software. QDAS is a data management platform that facilitates communication among research team members (Peterson, 2019). The thematic analysis allowed us to identify, analyze, and organize themes within our dataset and capture and compare opinions and experiences from various students across the data sources (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

To ensure that the themes produced from the whole body of data are transferable and reproducible in future studies of similarity, the researcher synthesized the data using detailed, precise descriptions. Thick, precise descriptions generated by the data synthesis technique ensured the study's findings' transferability and reproducibility. Large amounts of data were

sorted, rearranged, managed, and saved using qualitative data analysis software (QDAS) like NVivo; to develop a coherent singular body of evidence that produces a single set of themes. Lastly, the entire resulting body of the data analysis processes were then identified into a single set of selective themes that emerged from all the data collection methods of analysis; creating triangulation supporting the surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions to increase knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon. A credible study provides assurance that you have properly collected and interpreted the data so that the findings and conclusions accurately reflect and represent the world that was studied (Yin, 2015).

Trustworthiness

The hallmark of high-quality qualitative, naturalistic research is trustworthiness, typically viewed as the counterpart to rigor, validity, and credibility in conventional quantitative research (Peterson, 2019). Trustworthiness in qualitative research includes justifying certain elements within the context of answering the research questions regarding credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Trustworthiness of the research is one of those shared realities, albeit a subjective one, wherein readers and writers might find commonality in their constructive processes (Stahl & King, 2020).

Credibility

Credibility was obtained using multiple forms of data collection methods to produce triangulation. Accuracy and accountability attributes are in particular aligned with credibility concepts (Liao, & Hitchcock, 2018). Credibility was achieved in three ways: (a) member-checking, (b) peer debriefing, and (c) reflexivity. Utilizing three forms of different data collection methods proves more strong, stable, and reliable means therefore showing the importance of using triangulation mixed methods design. However, in combination, multiple

methods that do not share the same failings can enhance data validity and credibility (Turner et al., 2017). According to Creswell & Creswell (2018), this process increases the credibility and dependability of the study because it ensures that the participants understand with clarity the statements used during the qualitative research process. Participants were allowed to see the data-collecting procedure and the study's findings and provide comments. Participants were urged to compare the data gathered from them with their own lived experiences and viewpoints during member verification to guarantee its correctness and relevance.

A member-checking process was used to make sure the research was reliable. Member checking increased the study's credibility and guarantee that the results appropriately reflect the experiences and viewpoints of the participants. Participants' ability to cross-check the data gathered enriched the research and make its conclusions more reliable and relevant. Peer debriefing were also used to enhance the credibility of the study. It was utilized by having the participants involved talk, discuss, justify, and clarify any personal or professional individual or team's views and opinions regarding the study. Peer briefing were accomplished by having more than one person's point of view; this was paramount in achieving trustworthiness in qualitative research as it reduced and minimized common grammatical, writing, spelling, wording, or phrase errors that are sometimes associated with qualitative research.

These prior identified validation components, referential materials, and structural relationships, as well as the other cited strategies, would assist in leaving an audit trail for replication, applicability, and generalizing across studies if desired (Albert, 2020). Using reflexivity added to the credibility. Reflexivity examines one's conceptual lens, explicit and implicit assumptions, preconceptions, and values, and how these affect research decisions in all phases of qualitative studies (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). By taking notes regarding the

participants' comments and the researcher's ideas during the interview, reflexivity was achieved. Reflexivity allowed researchers to be mindful and aware of their participation in the research study and clearly described their role and the participant's role in the study.

Dependability

To ensure dependability in research, it is important to consider the reliability, availability, and security of related systems (Boucerredj & Debbache, 2018). To achieve reliability, it was necessary to establish consistent and repeatable procedures that produce accurate results. The researcher ensured that data collection and analysis processes are consistent and that all participants are treated equally to strengthen the study's dependability. Practical procedural approaches were used to handle the connected system qualities of reliability, availability, and security. By allowing others to access the study results, availability was guaranteed. The dependability of the study was assured by addressing the connected systems' reliability, availability, and security via efficient procedural procedures. By enabling others to review the research results and evaluate the research method, using an audit trail and peer engagement will further improve the study's reliability.

Confirmability

Methods, such as triangulation, member checks, peer debriefing, and reflexivity were used to ensure the reliability and verifiability of the research findings. The validity of the research was strengthened by triangulation by making use of a variety of data-gathering techniques, including surveys, interviews, and focus groups. The researcher and participants were both able to evaluate the validity of the study using these data collection strategies, which provided a more thorough knowledge of the phenomena of interest. By providing a range of

datasets to describe various facets of a phenomenon, triangulation is recognized to improve research (Noble & Heale, 2019).

When applying these elements: (a) member-checking, (b) peer debriefing, and (c) reflexivity all participants were shown the major topics and the outcomes of the data synthesis for evaluation and confirmation. These strategies guaranteed that the results appropriately represent the participants' viewpoints and experiences and will boost their confidence in the study's findings. According to this approach, qualitative research may be confirmed (Chin et al., 2019; Shahrokhi et al., 2021). Overall, using triangulation, member checks, peer debriefing, and reflexivity made the research results more reliable and verifiable, resulting in a more thorough and solid study.

Transferability

Qualitative research has proven that generalization is a vital component used to help conceptualize the researcher's ability to try and experience, feel, interpret, and transfer the context of their study within the context of another study (Houghton et al., 2013; Meskele et al., 2020). To promote the transferability of the study's findings, the researcher used thick, rich descriptions throughout the study, enabling the results to be transferred or replicated in other studies of similarity. Thick descriptions were provided to readers to allow them to determine the applicability of the findings to their context. The proposed approach intent ensured the study's results can be transferred and applied to contexts beyond the current research.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher performed the study with fidelity professional ethics and morals and with an unbiased opinion towards the participants and study. The researcher sent an email to the school district explaining the research project in detail and asking permission to perform the

study. After receiving authorization from the school district, the researcher sent an email to Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to seek approval for the study. Before beginning the process of data collecting, the researcher ensured that all of the relevant ethical considerations and regulations are satisfied, even though it will be the duty of the school district to provide permission for the research to be conducted at the location. When both permissions were secured, the school district emailed to ask for their permission to participate in this voluntary research study. Consent forms were sent out to participants.

Securing data storage and security of participants' identities and privacy is always a priority while conducting qualitative research (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Privacy was ensured by protecting the anonymity of participants. This was achieved by masking their names in the data, and if a master list is needed, storage was done separately in an external hard drive. To further safeguard their privacy, pseudonyms were used in addition to disguising the participants' identities in the data. Each participant got a special pseudonym, which was utilized throughout the data gathering and analysis procedure in lieu of their actual identity. This assisted in preserving their privacy and preventing the unintentional revealing of their identity.

The pseudonyms were kept secure by being kept apart from the data on an external hard drive that will only be available to the researcher. To prevent unauthorized access, this master list was password-protected and encrypted. Additionally, the use of pseudonyms enabled researcher to identify specific replies and monitor changes over time without jeopardizing participant privacy, leading to more accurate data analysis. Overall, the privacy of participants was completely protected throughout the entire research process thanks to the use of pseudonyms along with name masking.

Data collection was protected using various reliable sources and means including locked and stored file cabinets. All materials of the research study will be destroyed 3 years after the study's conclusion per U.S. regulations. Participants did not receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. Benefits to society include a deeper understanding, awareness, and acceptance of the study topic. The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks the participants would encounter in everyday life.

Summary

Research designs are *logical* blueprints (Yin, 2016). A single intrinsic case study design in qualitative research design provides the most logical blueprint and was the most appropriate method, as it provided a more in-depth and greater descriptive assessment and examination of the uniqueness of the phenomenon being studied in its natural environment. A hallmark of a good qualitative case study is that it presents an in-depth understanding of the case (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The data collection methods (data triangulation) used surveys (online), individual interviews, and focus group discussions (in-person or zoom meeting); when used in a case study are deemed as effective and efficient methods to achieve triangulation of the phenomenon being studied. According to Yin (2016) in collecting data, the ideal triangulation would not only seek confirmation from three sources but would try to rely on three different kinds of sources.

In conclusion, the qualitative research design was the quintessential format when using a single intrinsic case study, data collection methods, and data analysis strategies that inform the target audience of the significance of the “how” and “why” as it pertains to the phenomenon. The author also states that it is the most preferred method of undertaking research when a question like “how” and “why” needs to be answered (Alam, 2021; 2020;). The need for additional multidimensional behavior intervention tools to ensure student and staff safety, provide optimal

learning opportunities, and increase academic and social engagement in secondary special education classrooms of today are paramount; when decreasing or eliminating the threat of ongoing physical aggression and SIB towards students, peers, and staff by nonverbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with ASD in self-contained classrooms. Again, according to Kara (2020), teachers' positive perception of their abilities affects their motivation and attitudes positively.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this single intrinsic case study was to describe the experiences of using multiple forms of non-verbal interventions simultaneously to decrease physical aggression and self-injurious behaviors for special education staff members in self-contained classrooms in Behaviorville ISD. Special education leadership continuously reviews data and seeks out effective non-verbal interventions aimed at improving student and staff safety in the learning environment. Data from the participants was collected via online surveys, individual interviews, and focus group discussion session (via zoom meetings). The participants are first presented with descriptions, utilizing demographic information to offer a comprehensive view of the educators involved. Following this, the findings will be structured around significant narrative themes. Additionally, outlier data that diverge from common patterns will be highlighted, providing a nuanced understanding of the varied experiences. The chapter concludes by synthesizing these elements, allowing for a detailed discussion in the subsequent chapter. The remainder of the chapter focuses on the analysis of the research data and significant findings.

Participants

Participants were selected using a purposive sampling approach. They were at least 21 years old and had a minimum of one year working in special education with NV/MV secondary special education students with ASD, physical aggression, and SIB. The participants were a diverse group of individuals. The range of ages for the participants was 31-60. The age of five of the participants was 30-39. The remaining five participants had ages in the range of 40-60. Two of the participants held a high school diploma. Two held an associate's degree. The other participants held a bachelor's degrees and above. All of the participants' years in working in the

field of special education ranged from five-35. Three of the participants identified their race as African American, four of the participants identified their race as Caucasian, one of the participants identified their race as Hispanic, one of the participants identified their race as Caucasian/Hispanic, and one of the participants identified their race as Multi ethnic – Indian, African American, and Caucasian. Five of the participants were female, and five of the participants were male. Participants, all of whom were given pseudonyms, are described in the following sections.

Table 4

Description of Special Educator Participants

Educator Participant	Years in Sped.	Highest Degree Earned	Current Position	Grade Level
Jeremy	6	Bachelor's Degree	Teacher	8 th -12 th
Lea	15	HS Diploma	Educational Asst.	8 th - 12 th
Wayne	8	Associate's Degree	Educational Asst.	8 th - 12 th
Marie	8	Associate's Degree	Administrative Secretary	6 th - 12 th
Louise	9	Bachelor's Degree	Behavior Facilitator	6 th - 12 th
Alberto	6	HS Diploma	Educational Asst.	6 th - 12 th
Jonee	8	Bachelor's Degree	Behavior Facilitator	6 th - 12 th
Ron	20	Graduate Degree	Behavior Facilitator	6 th - 12 th
Michael	15	Graduate Degree	Assoc. Director	6 th - 12 th
Kay	35	Graduate Degree	Behavior Facilitator	6 th - 12 th

Jeremy

Jeremy is a 30-39, year-old Caucasian male who has worked in the field of special education for six years. He is currently a special education teacher in BISD. Jeremy stated, “I initially started out working in special education by accident.” He was a graduate of Oklahoma Christian University with a bachelor’s degree in Public Relations and Marketing, where he worked over ten years before deciding to do a career change. He went through an alternative teacher certification program to become a special education teacher. Jeremy stated,

What was crazy is what brought me to this classroom, which is complete luck because when I first got into it, I had no clue what I was getting into. He continued, I actually came on as an educational assistant my first year in SEEC while working on my certification and then the next year the teacher left and I took over class and now I have been here six years working with the same students.

Lea

Lea is a 50-59, year old Caucasian female who has worked in the field of special education for 15 years, she is currently an educational assistant in BISD. Lea completed her high school diploma and has some educational experience at the junior college level. Lea described working with many individuals with disabilities in her career, where she took courses in autism, behaviors, and ASL. Lea stated,

I started out mainly working with early childhood, pre-k through 5th grade students, and also have experience working with blind and deaf students ... about 10 years ago I moved to the secondary middle and high school where I am currently an educational assistant in the SEEC classroom.

Wayne

Wayne is a 30-39 year-old Caucasian male who has worked in the field of special education for four years. He is currently an educational assistant in BISD. Wayne has an associate's degree and is currently pursuing his bachelor's degree in Educational Studies. Wayne stated,

I am planning on becoming a special education teacher once I graduate ...I am currently an educational assistant in the SEEC classroom for non-verbal autistic kids that are self-injurious and prior to that I was an educational assistant in the TEAMS classroom.

Marie

Marie is a 50-59 year old Caucasian female who has worked in the field of special education for eight years. She is currently an administrative secretary at a high school in BISD. Marie has an associate's degree and is currently pursuing her bachelor's degree. Marie stated, "I worked with a variety of special education students from non-verbal, high functioning autistic students for eight years. ...then I moved into the administrative offices for personal and professional growth opportunities." Marie noted that even in this position she still gets to help and work with special education students.

Louise

Louise is a 30-39 year old African American female who has worked in the field of special education for nine years. She is currently a behavior facilitator for BISD. Louise has her bachelor's degree and is currently seeking an advanced degree. Louise stated,

Prior to coming to BISD, I did clinical work in ABA for two years and before that, I was an assistant teacher for an alternative day school program ... I do In-Home services currently and I've been doing that for about 11-12 years now.

Alberto

Alberto is a 40-49 year old Hispanic male who has worked in the field of special education for six years. He is currently an educational assistant for BISD. Alberto has a high school diploma with some educational experience at the junior college level. Alberto stated,

I've worked in behavioral psych and substance abuse for I want to say, and I also served in the military for about 14 to 15 years. This will be my six-year working with special educational kids with Autism, Down syndrome, and special learning needs.

Jonee

Jonee is a 30-39 year old African American female who has worked in the field of special education for eight years. Jonee is currently a behavior facilitator for BISD. Jonee has her bachelor's degree and is currently seeking an advanced degree. Jonee stated,

Following my time in college is when I got into the field of working with special need individuals and that was through a local residential treatment center ... I worked there for one year and then following that I transitioned into ABA, Applied Behavior Analysis and during that time I obtained my Registered Behavior Technician (RBT) certification. I worked there for one year and wanted a change of scenery, so I ended up moving back home and I worked at another ABA clinic for four years and then I transitioned into to special education.

Ron

Ron is a 40-49 year old African American male who has worked in the field of special education for 20 years. Ron is currently a case manager. Ron has his bachelor's and master's degree and is currently seeking an advanced degree at the doctoral level. Ron also noted that he has an extensive background working with youth. Ron stated,

I work with our youth as a case manager for them and their families. But truly, my background has been in working with those students who are Autistic and who are considered to be Emotional Disturbed (Ed), students who are Autistic, both high functioning and low functioning students.

Michael

Michael is a 30-39 year old Caucasian/Hispanic male who has worked in the field of special education for five years. Michael is currently a program director for a non-profit working with emotionally disturbed at-risk youth. Michael has his bachelor's degree in General Studies with an emphasis in education and his master's degree in Educational Psychology-DFST.

Michael stated,

I have worked on internships at the International Newcomer's Academy, The Parenting Center, and I have also worked as an investigator for CPS... Professionally, I have worked in various positions in higher and public education, including admissions, testing, and as an educational assistant in a self-contained SPED TEAMS classroom.

Kay

Kay is a 60-69 year old Indian, African American, and Caucasian female who has worked in the field of special education for 35 years. Kay is currently a behavior facilitator for BISD.

Kay currently holds a duo bachelor's in education (Elementary/Special Education) and a master's in special education with an Emphasis on Severely Emotionally Disturbed. Kay stated,

I work with students identified as having special needs, ages 3 to 22. Some of these students are students who have limited or no language. Some of these students are identified as having the characteristics of autism spectrum disorder and exhibit physical aggressive and self-injurious behaviors. It is my job to keep them and others safe.

Results

This study was guided by one central research question and two sub-questions to describe the experiences of using multiple forms of non-verbal interventions simultaneously to decrease physical aggression and self-injurious behaviors for special education staff members in self-contained classrooms. The following supporting research questions were included to help conceptualize the experiences of the participants: 1) How do secondary special education teachers' perceptions and beliefs towards utilizing non-verbal interventions influence their adoption and implementation in self-contained classrooms? 2) What challenges do secondary special education teachers encounter when incorporating non-verbal interventions and their effectiveness in self-contained classrooms? 3) How do secondary special education teachers' perceptions and beliefs towards non-verbal interventions equip and influence their adoption and implementation in self-contained classrooms?

Theme Development

Participants completed online surveys, individual interviews, and focus group discussion session (via zoom meetings). The thematic findings emerged from the participants' responses of the data using the thematic analysis (TA) approach. The results from the thematic analysis led to three recurring themes from the online surveys, individual interviews, and the focus group discussion-data. I used the six-step process suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) to identify, analyze, organize, describe, and finalize the themes generated from the data. Several codes were clustered to form the themes and sub-themes. Codes appeared repeatedly well over 350 times during all participant online survey forms, interview transcripts, and focus group discussion transcripts. The following themes, subthemes, and outliers emerged with regard to the review of the data. Three principal themes discovered in this study are as follows: (a) communication

deficits between NV/MV students and staff, including the subthemes of non-verbal approaches, frustration, patience, and consistency (b) relationship building is paramount when working with students, produced the subthemes our students deserve better, trust and rapport, confidence, and commitment, and (c) safety first, which included the subthemes student and staff safety, teamwork, and CPI-as a last resort. Each theme represents a significant aspect of the teachers' perceptions of utilizing multiple forms of non-verbal interventions simultaneously in a self-contained classroom.

Table 5

Themes and Sub-Themes

Theme	Subthemes			
Communication Deficits between NV/MV Students and Staff	Non-verbal Approaches	Frustration	Patience	Consistency
Relationship Building is Paramount when Working with Students	Our Students Deserve Better	Trust and Rapport	Confidence	Commitment
Safety First	Students' and Staff Safety	Teamwork	CPI-as a Last Resort.	

Communication Deficits between NV/MV Students and Staff

Communication deficits between students and staff were top priority with all ten participants as they echoed and agreed with this main experience throughout the three data collection methods. Ron stated, "Educators must be proactive in removing barriers from instructional methods to help ensure access and agency for all." When asked how they felt about these communication deficits and how it affected and impacted teaching, all ten participants were quick to point out, that at times it was very difficult and challenging, but at the same time very

rewarding and worthwhile. Two of the participants agreed as Lea stated, "I have to meet the varied needs of multiple learners and multiply learning styles." Most participants acknowledged that lack of communication can pose unforeseen problems and issues for students with little to no communication. Kay commented, "Some students may have accommodations and others may not, by using various non-verbal interventions simultaneously provides for students at varying levels of instructional needs." Marie stated, "This helps students who might have trouble speaking or understanding spoken words, and with the help of nonverbal therapies like gestures, facial expressions, and visual signals can improve communication." The participants' main concept was that there are communication gaps and deficits, that should be expected, but how are they going to deal with this issue ultimately became the topic of discussion amongst all participants. Louise stated,

The effectiveness of special educators using multiple forms of non-verbal interventions in a self-contained classroom lies in their ability to cater to individual learning styles, enhance communication, manage behavior, increase engagement, promote accessibility, and create an inclusive learning environment.

Most of the participants' goals were aimed on producing positives solution to the communication deficits by being creative in their interventions. Michael stated,

Dealing with behaviors you can use different forms of nonverbal intervention by facial expression with a student to redirect an undesired behavior. Your proximity to a student can be an intervention. Gestures with your body and position can determine a behavior. Touch on the shoulder or just to let them know you're there and that you care.

Although the participants were quick to say that communication deficits were a key point in the discussions, they were also quick to point out multiple ways of effectively overcoming these deficits as well. Marie stated,

Educators using nonverbal interventions in a self-contained classroom helps prevent over stimulation in other students. This is a crucial component when dealing with students and how their behavioral actions can affect and impact others, if not attended too in a timely manner.

Michael stated,

Educators can also use non-verbal interventions to motivate or engage students. It also allows you to call attention or provide a reminder to a task without drawing the attention of the entire classroom. Which is a vital point when working with a student one-on-one to prevent off-task or other acting-out behaviors from occurring.

Non-Verbal Communication Approaches

Non-verbal communication approaches play a major role in the behaviors of these students and how behaviors are displayed. The majority of participants mutually agreed that which non-verbal interventions utilized, at what times, and with other nonverbal interventions could indeed decrease behaviors from occurring and prevent others from happening, altogether.

Michael stated,

Special educators are more effective utilizing multiple forms of non-formal interventions to provide emphasis, clarity, or direction. There are communication devices like the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), using the American Sign Language (ASL), Visual Aids, and other Augmentation devices that provides services and supports to students who are NV/MV.

Jonee added, “Non-verbal interventions are effective because they typically involve non-threatening approaches to assist students. Therefore, making the learning environment safer for both students and staff.” Jeremy stated,

We use visual schedules to help support and guide students throughout the day, by giving our students access to communication using PECS or any other type of devices (hand-gestures, facial expressions, proximity) are extremely effective, and that’s been one of our main drivers, because our kids do get upset over communication approaches and how they vary.

Lea stated,

Some students may respond better to visual cues, while others may benefit more from physical prompts or gestures. By using a variety of non-verbal interventions simultaneously, we can help to ensure that all students are able to access and understand the information being presented to them.

Many non-verbal students are aware of these non-verbal interventions in the form of American Sign Language (ASL), as many are taught this at early stages and points in their life, oftentimes by parents and schools. Wayne stated, “These interventions, including visual aids, sign language, tactile materials, and augmentative and alternative communication devices, provide alternative pathways for information access and expression, bridging communication gaps and fostering an inclusive learning environment.”

The overall responses from the participants were positive in the way they were able to deliver solutions regarding non-verbal approaches to communicating. Jeremy stated, “For instance, visual schedules, gesture-based communication, and sensory tools might be used consistently to provide structure, support understanding, and assist with self-regulation for

students with diverse learning and communication needs.” These and other non-verbal tools were highlighted and used effectively throughout the data collection process.

Frustration

Communication is perplexed at times, but when it comes in the form of non-verbal communication from students who have significant deficits in their language skills it can cause frustration. Frustration among all ten participants was another key factor that was stated during the data collection processes at some point or another. One participant made known that her frustration came due to many challenges that some of these students present. Kay stated,

My challenge when working with non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with ASD is trying to teach the students to use the interventions that will help shape their behaviors in a more positive way. The majority of these students have learned inappropriate behaviors and have used these behaviors for a number of years.

Lea commented, “When they are in the middle of a meltdown and Yeah, screaming at you ...This can cause staff frustrations.” The other participants agreed with being frustrated at various times when dealing and working with students. Marie stated, “When kids are in crisis mode it puts everyone in crisis mode.” Alberto agreed, “I would just like to add that yelling. Yelling is also one of the things that triggers everybody and can cause a domino effect in the classroom.”

All the participants had varying responses to levels of frustrations, and why some forms of non-verbal communication approaches worked and some didn't work. Kay stated, “Initially when using multiple forms of non-verbal interventions in my self-contained classroom, it wasn't easy. It takes time and consistency to develop the ease of using multiple forms of non-verbal

interventions in a self-contained classroom environment.” This was reiterated and agreed upon by all ten participants as reasoning to feel frustrated at times, due to non-verbal communication approaches.

Patience

Patience, it is one characteristic that most people want, but few have, especially working with NV/MV verbally secondary special education students with ASD, physical aggression and SIB. Louise stated, “Patience and a calm, positive staff member because if you maintain calmness and patience in escalated situations, then sometimes it will have a positive effect on how long and how intense the situation will occur.” Jeremy added, “You also have to be non-reactive when things happened and come in there with an understanding that it's not about you.” Marie stated,

You know, we always have to have patience, and no matter how bad of a day, that we may personally be having as staff, we kind of have to check it at the door and have that constant calm and respect for our students, because if we go in agitated, they may trigger our behaviors, so patience goes a long way in dealing with ourselves and our kiddoes.

Consistency

In the world of special education, consistency holds high regard to all ten of the participants. Marie stated, “Working with students takes time and consistency.” Louise added, “Effective and consistent communication is the key.” Jonee stated, “Nonverbal interventions are to be used daily and consistently in self-contained classrooms.” Ron added, “We need to do it quite frequently and consistently in the classroom.” Alberto stated, “I utilize non-verbal interventions every single day.” Michael stated, “Moreover, the use of diverse non-verbal strategies consistently enhances student engagement by making learning materials more

accessible and interactive, which can lead to improved academic outcomes and better social interactions among students with different learning challenges.” Kay added, “A consistent smile or a stern look can go a long way in keeping a student on track.” Jeremy agreed, “In self-contained classrooms, it's critical for teachers to regularly and consistently evaluate the results of nonverbal interventions and make any modifications.” Wayne commented, “This would depend on the needs of students in the classroom; however, non-verbal interventions are utilized consistently throughout the day in every facet of instruction.” Lea stated, “I use consistency all though out the course of the day.” Consistency is a major component that is free to use, but oftentimes not utilized on a daily basis in the classroom to make learning more structured, fun, and engaging.

Relationship Building is Paramount When Working with Students

All participants wholeheartedly agreed that relationship building is a non-verbal intervention when used simultaneously with other non-verbal interventions, is effective with NV/MV secondary students with ASD, physical aggression, and SIB. Relationship-building skills made a positive impact with the teacher and students. Jeremy claimed, “The teacher/student relationship is key to any kind of intervention. You must establish a relationship with the student. It builds trust and more confidence in the student.”

It is so important not only in the field of education, but also in life, to remember that every child is different and unique, therefore, so should every relationship. The relationship-building theme emerged from the data collection process. It is the discussion of relationships that elicited the emotional responses from all ten participants. Positive student/teacher relationship drives student success. Michael stated, “Teachers can form stronger relationships with students and build rapport in these self-contained environments, which can help motivate students to

participate and be successful.” Ron added, “Positive relationships between teachers and students enhance student receptivity to instruction, which also affects academics.”

The majority of the participants addressed building trust, establishing a rapport, genuine love and care, patience, and kindness. Jeremy stated, “It takes time and effort to establish a rapport with students and demonstrate to them that the instructor is dependable and really concerned about their welfare.” Wayne commented, “Moreover, the consistent and stable environment of a self-contained classroom allows for the development of a deeper rapport between teachers and students, promoting a sense of security and belonging.”

These viewpoints echoed over and over in the participants’ responses as they felt and looked compelled to tell their stories. Ron stated, “I mean, personally and professionally I feel great with working with them and I truly believe it is my calling.” Marie expressed, “I think every child deserves a chance. They need to feel loved, understood and appreciated. It shouldn’t matter what their behaviors are, each individual in this world deserves to be given kindness.”

Alberto stated,

Umm, you know, one of the things that I love that people don't understand is like, everything is so difficult in the beginning, but once you get that student to care and you get that student to open up, it is the most rewarding joy to have them day in and day out.

Jeremy emphasized,

But I mean, honestly, what kept me here as long as it has is that every one of these students deserve to get an education and support from someone who's not scared of them, from someone who does not get upset when they take out their anger. These kids need someone who generally loves them.

All students are not the same, so each relationship is not the same. Wayne stated,

With smaller class sizes, teachers can tailor their approaches to meet the unique needs and learning styles of each student, fostering a sense of understanding and support. This close interaction enables teachers to build strong, trusting relationships with their students, which is crucial for students who may require additional emotional or behavioral support.

All 10 participants agreed that positive relationships go a long way in removing barriers and roadblocks that oftentimes can prevent and block student and staff individual progress. Lea stated, "First off, personally I like learning from these kids. I love learning from these individuals. It helps me as a person to understand them." Louise stated,

It's actually my ideal job to do because a lot of individuals with autism are nonverbal, and so when they are physically aggressive or, you know, harm someone, it's usually because they're trying to communicate their needs and wants and if they're hurting or something like that. So yeah, I'm pretty comfortable working with this population.

Jonee stated,

My attitudes towards working with those individuals, I think it takes someone special, I think that not everyone can do it. It takes a specific skill set to be able to have the patience to kind of dissect the behaviors and kind of understand the function so that you can properly come up with interventions to help support them, although it can be difficult once you are able to figure out you know that function or the reason why it's happening it is a rewarding experience. So overall, we'll say it's difficult, but it's also rewarding once you start to see the fruits of your labor.

The participants' points of view on relationship building with their students

touched many aspects of life, from wanting them to be successful, exceeding expectations, to reaching their own goals and dreams, and to one day be as independent as possible. Wayne reiterated,

So, for this question I put came from a professional standpoint. I think it's crucial to approach these kids with empathy and a commitment to creating this is safe and supportive environment. It requires a high level of dedication and patience and specialized knowledge.

Kay stated, "I enjoy working with students who are non-verbal or have minimal verbal skills and are physically aggressive and engage in SIB. I find it both challenging and rewarding." One of the participants, who was a former special education staff member, said that leaving the school and kids was very hard because of all the relationships that he established.

Michael commented,

I personally feel that it takes very caring, patient, and compassionate individuals to work with these populations of students. While it was not my long-term professional goal, working with these students helped me develop knowledge, understanding and patience.

Positive relationship building skills are built and developed on ethical core values and key principals that drive each person to be better, despite their faults, setbacks, and imperfections. This was truly modeled in the participants regarding this theme.

Our Students Deserve Better

It has been said that there are no bad students, just bad choices. These sentiments cannot be heard or shared enough in the world of special education when you are dealing with, working with, and caring for, children with special needs. The majority of participants were all quick to

say and point out that all a kid needs is a little love. Jeremy stated, “You can't work in these classrooms without being like truly loving the kids and wanting to know them.” Ron stated,

As educators, we have to truly address the correct behaviors with the correct interventions and so many times we try to correct behaviors with the wrong interventions and our kids are non-responsive to those and it causes them to become either more frustrated or even cause them to be more upset and really push them to a point of physical aggression ... Number one non-verbal intervention would be the teacher student relationship.

Marie stated,

Autism has such a wide spectrum; each student is individual. What works for one student may not work for the next student ... I think every child deserves a chance. They need to feel loved, understood and appreciated.

Being different doesn't mean being left out. So many times, students in special education are left out, or required to do so much above the norm, just to be included. Staff members who are not familiar with special education or their students, or just simply don't understand or have the relationship with these students, to truly make a difference and stop the stereotypical judgment calls regarding special education. Alberto stated, “Students are basically able to reach their physical and emotional needs and their individual potential with our help and support.”

Jeremy stated,

But I mean, honestly, what kept me here as long as it has is that every one of these students deserve to get an education and support from someone who's not scared of them, from someone who does not get upset when they take out their anger. These kids need

someone who generally loves them. All kids are different, but that doesn't stop them from being kids.

Trust and Rapport

Establishing and building trust and rapport in any relationship is crucial, but even more so, working with special needs students with ASD. Kay stated, "You have to get to know the student better... This is the beginning stages and establishes that positive teacher/student relationship, that is built upon trust and rapport." Louise added, "1:1 instruction builds a rapport with teacher/student that is strong and learners then build trust and have confidence as staff is able to focus on their individual's needs." Jonee stated, "The teacher/student relationship based on solid rapport can be effective in a self-contained classroom. This creates a space for trust and respect between the pupil and teacher." Michaels commented,

The teacher/student relationship is key to any kind of intervention. You must establish a relationship with the student. It builds trust and more confidence in the student. Once they trust that someone is in their corner, they are able to be calm. Behaviors won't be as prevalent. Always show interest in something that they may enjoy. They will be more productive in their day.

Confidence

A staff member who shows confidence in their abilities goes a long way to reassuring and providing confidence and self-assurance in others. Some participants expressed their concerns when it came to having confidence in performing or doing this particular job well. There is no blue print or prior instructions when working with NV/MV secondary special education students with ASD, physical aggression, and SIB. Alberto stated, "You know, being calm and confident,

being patient, it's keeping your cool in this kind of environment is also very important.” Wayne added, “100% agreed.”

It is certain characteristics that special education staff members need to have when working effectively in this type of specialized environment and programs. Jeremy stated, “You got to have someone who is very confident, has good character, someone who's very patient and loving.” Working in the field of special education a person cannot lack confidence when working with this population of students. Just like any other students, they can spot lack of confidence and exploit it. All five of the female participants agreed with Jeremy’s statement. Lea (who stands only 5 foot) added,

Regarding confidence working with mostly male students who are secondary, meaning they are bigger, taller, and stronger than elementary special education students and some adults. Yeah, I do agree with him that you need somebody strong. Calm and confident when things happen.

All five of the male participants all agreed with the female participants. Kay added,

I agree with Lea, but I would also like to add a person who is competent in their abilities. No when and what they can handle and what they can't handle. No one when to intervene and when not to intervene. When to put themselves in a situation and when not to get involved in the situation? So, I would have to agree and say a person that is very competent in their abilities, is good.

Commitment

When working with special needs children being committed is a vital part of the relationship-building process. Due to the nature of the classroom and the student’s disabilities,

sometimes commitment is hard to find. Kay stated, “I use a stick-to-it-ness approach combined with tailored interventions/strategies. I don’t give up.” Michael added,

Initially, I did not understand the teacher-student relationship that these students develop with the educator when they are non-verbal or minimally verbal. This relationship is paramount to developing a sense of mutual respect. And that is why I stayed.

The male participants agreed that when you develop strong relationships it builds strong bonds with both student and staff. Wayne added,

It takes time and effort to establish a rapport with students and demonstrate to them that the instructor is dependable and really concerned about their welfare ... In a self-contained classroom environment, the teacher/student relationship can be particularly effective due to the personalized and focused nature of instruction.

Marie stated, “Many times, the teacher/student relationship is stronger. There are fewer students therefore they get individualized attention.” Lea stated, “One of the benefits of teaching in a self-contained classroom is the extra time we have to build rapport with the students.” Commitment takes commitment, and all of the participants had taken time to be committed, to not only the students, but also, to each other.

Safety First

Safety first, is a common theme with regard to safety for students and staff. Being physically assaulted, hurt or injured by a student is one of the top priorities that has plagued school districts for decades. Students with disabilities, present special education staff members with additional precautions when it comes to safety and being prepared. Teachers and staff are given the tools they need through many positive behavioral intervention programs. Crisis Prevention Intervention (CPI) training is one of these programs. CPI is used to prevent, de-

escalate and defuse, crisis situations. As a last resort, physical intervention is a tactic that helps keep self-contained students and staff safe. Michael added,

Crisis prevention intervention training is necessary for all staff to learn how to appropriately attend to a crisis and de-escalate a situation if possible. This also is necessary to address a situation and provide time until a campus crisis team can respond to assist in the classroom.

A majority of the participants agreed that CPI is a necessary evil when working with NV/MV secondary special education students with ASD, physical aggression, and SIB. Kay stated,

I take great pleasure deciphering what they may be saying and assisting them in finding a way to get their needs met more appropriately. I would not feel like the student is intentionally trying to assault me. However, I would restrain the student if it means the safety of myself and the student.

Lack of communication and limited communication causes fear, stress, and anxiety in not only staff members but the students as well. This causes them to communicate sometimes the only way they know how i.e. hitting, kicking, biting, throwing objects, pulling hair, and head-butting. These and other crisis behaviors like kneeling themselves, chasing staff/peers around the classroom in an attempt to cause harm or danger, can become very dangerous. Michael stated,

I can speak from being in this position before. I have been punched in the face, kicked in the shin, and scratched at various times. While initially I was very caught off guard and frustrated with aggressive behaviors from this population, I quickly realized that this was simply the student's way of communicating strong emotions they were feeling or needs

but could not find other methods of expression. This frustration turned into a desire to learn what the student needed or was trying to communicate.

One of the female participants shared a different take on physical aggression and the fear factor that it presents to other participants. Lea stated,

Honestly, it doesn't bother me. I know it does bother some people, but to me it's just a possibility, with this position. Each child is different, their behaviors are too. I think it's all in how you react to the behaviors that they may, you know, present. We also have specific training to de-escalate, possibly before it gets to that aggression and you do get hit or assault.

Instead of staff members being in a state of fear, they look at the reasons or functions of the aggressive behaviors. Louise commented,

Well, you have to first have to determine if it's a physical assault or again, you know if they need something or what's going on with them. So, I want to find out. I'm going to, you know, see what's happening in the surrounding area to see why the individual hit me to begin with, it could have been anything. Something could be upsetting them or they want something. I mean, I'll find out the why first and then try to help it.

This can be quite overwhelming for some people to have to deal with such harmful and dangerous behaviors, but participants viewpoints and perspectives indeed shed light to what others would deem very scary and dangerous at times. Jonee stated,

We are all human, so of course is not ideal. I think for me personally. It is not something that I'm used to, but I know that it comes with the field, whereas someone who is not aware or who is not properly trained, it may be alarming to them, but for me, if I have the proper support and if I have, you know, the right information going into the situation, I

think that I am OK with working with those individuals. Of course, no one wants to get beat up and bruised, but I think with the proper team it you can work through it.

Marie added,

Umm, it's scary. I had to realize that through the years, that it may not have necessarily been me personally that they were coming after so much, as I was someone there and that was their only form of communication. They were so frustrated and that was their way to get my attention to help them, and it was to aggressively come after me or try to grab me to help them.

While it is scary, and no one likes to get assaulted, the participants all understood the bigger picture that was causing the acting-out behaviors. Alberto stated,

I wouldn't feel endanger. I would feel like the student is in some type of trouble due to the reason that he's not able to control themselves in the surrounding of the classroom. I would be very careful about my surroundings and coworkers and especially the safety of everybody around us.

Jeremy added,

Alright, well I have been assaulted multiple times and I do not get upset or hold any resentment to them. Most of the reasons why they're having this behavior is because they can't communicate their wants and needs. They don't hold it personally against you, they'll be over it in like 10 minutes and the next thing trying to, you know, be happy and hug you.

Many of the participants are afraid or fearful, but not of getting hurt or injured, but making sure that their students are kept safe, even if it means getting hurt, or injured by physically aggressive and SIB caused by their students. Ron stated,

Well, some students with special needs have emotional, communication, and social issues in addition to their difficulties with learning. And so, for me, when these students fail to understand and become frustrated or feel threatened in some way. Their first response may be to lash out at the person closest to them, and in the school setting this is usually the teacher or paraprofessional.

Wayne added,

I said it does not bother me whatsoever. My level of empathy, I think, overwhelms any personal grudges or primal instincts like reactions you have to that. So, I mean it doesn't bother me, it just comes with the territory.

Fear is common, when working with students who may display physical aggression or self-injurious behaviors in the learning environment; however, what others fail to see is what are the functions or root causes of those aggressive behaviors. Many of the participants shared their concerns about fear, and most agreed that in the world of special education, fear doesn't really matter as long as their students feel safe and staff is there to protect them.

Students and Staff Safety

Student and staff safety are vital when working with students with physical aggression and SIB, as the threat of a physical attack can occur at any time. Despite the real threat of putting themselves in imminent harm and danger, each of the ten participants put overall student and staff safety first, at the top of their list. All 10 participants responded that they have been physically attacked by students' multiple times with some sustaining injuries like multiple concussions, shoulder and knee surgeries, being slapped, choked, bite, spit upon, along with hit, kicked and their hair being pulled out. These types of behaviors have at times caused major pain and suffering to the participants.

Participants have endured many physical setbacks, as assaults have come in the form of physical aggression, object aggression, and destruction of property as classroom materials have been used as weapons towards staff. On occasion, some students have used whatever classroom objects are readily available and within their reach. Marie added,

That has happened. Umm, it's scary. I would try to hope that there would be another staff member in the classroom to try and separate the student from the other staff room from the other staff. Try and get that staff away from the student and make sure that they were physically OK and then continuously to check on them to see if they were mentally OK.

Despite the many and varied physical assaults and outbursts attempted by NV/MV secondary special education students with ASD, participants responded to their students and staff safety. Their safety deeds went above and beyond what mere words written down on paper can describe. Ron stated, "Well, first I would make sure that the scene is actually safe and then ask the person that was attacked if they're OK, and make sure that the student who did the attack is OK." Alberto added, "I would be very careful about my surroundings and coworkers and especially the safety of everybody around us.

Jeremy added,

Alright, well I have been assaulted multiple times and I do not get upset or hold any resentment to them... I would 100% would jump in and talk. I would be talking to both the student and the person getting assaulted. Try to immediately redirect the student.

Lea stated,

Umm, we also have specific training to de-escalate possibly before it gets to that aggression and you do get hit or assault. First and foremost, you have to ensure safety of all the people who are in contact or within the room or wherever you're at. I would

remove other students or other people, just so they're not in the way, and next I would like attend to the person in case they needed medical help. Call on your radio for backup. And hopefully you have a team of people that can help and come and assist.

The remaining participants all agreed that student safety is first and then the safety of their colleagues and co-workers next, when working with this population of students. Student and staff safety go hand-in-hand.

Teamwork and CPI, as a Last Resort

The ten participants shared their viewpoints and perspectives from their lived experiences, knowledge, and hands-on-training. They all agreed that CPI should absolutely be used as a last resort and that it requires trained and knowledgeable people on a team to successfully implement all the components associated with CPI. Kay stated,

Crisis prevention intervention training can be effective in a self-contained classroom environment simply because the teacher would know how to respond more effectively in a crisis situation and can develop a viable plan of action to circumvent or better prepare for a crisis situation.

Louise added, “This comprehensive approach contributes to creating a safe and supportive learning environment for students with diverse needs.” Jonee emphasized, “De-escalation and proactive strategies are necessary to ensure the safety of both staff and students.” A majority of the participants agreed with the safety techniques and strategies that CPI provides. Jeremy stated,

In an escalated situation in a classroom, you may have to apply crisis intervention. The student may have a behavior that has escalated and CPI training is useful when the student is self-injurious, or an injure to other people. As a last resort, it can give you some protection.

CPI shouldn't be used to hurt or injure but only to protect. Untrained staff members must go through formal training and get certified to even be in programs that have students who present imminent harm to self or others. Wayne's statements regarding CPI and its policies and procedures were echoed and appreciated by all ten participants who have either been involved, assisted, and/or witness CPI restraints first-hand. Wayne stated,

Moreover, CPI training emphasizes communication, empathy, and respect, fostering a positive and supportive classroom environment that can reduce the frequency and intensity of challenging behaviors ... CPI training equips educators with strategies to de-escalate potentially volatile situations in a way that is safe, respectful, and non-restrictive.

In a CPI restraint, every team member is important and crucial in providing safety first to the student who is in need, and then assistance to any staff member who may have gotten hurt or injured during the process. Another note of emphasis is that these students are secondary students and pose even a greater risk of harm or injury to self or others due to their size. All the female participants had commented on the mere size of secondary students. Jonee stated, "I agree with the ladies, and I would like to add probably any physical aggression would cause harm or injury, especially at the secondary level, the kids are bigger." Many of the female participants referred to some real-life scenarios regarding teamwork and CPI with secondary students due to their size and some of the issues they're sizes caused. Marie stated,

We all support each other, so when someone is not there or something happens or there's a crisis and there may only be one staff member or two staff members and two staff members cannot handle the six-foot-four 250-pound dude, yeah, we all have to help.

Outlier Data and Findings

Outliers in research can emerge as inconsistent data objects that form out of the norm of possible themes or sub-themes regarding the research questions. An outlier can be defined as a data object that appears to be inconsistent with the rest of the dataset based on some measure or as an observation that deviates significantly from other observations, giving rise to suspicions about the correctness of the data or the behavior of the system (Nowak-Brzezińska, & Łazarz, 2021). The following outlier emerged with regard to the review of the data: Parenting NV/MV students with behaviors at an early.

Parenting NV/MV Students with Behaviors at An Early Age

Parenting a special needs child is oftentimes quite challenging and rewarding. Marie stated, “Student emotions escalate quickly. Those who work in a self-contained classroom and have training are able to identify triggers more quickly than not trained individuals. Redirection can be started sooner rather than later.” There is no parent handbook for raising children, especially children with disabilities. The behaviors start somewhere and oftentimes at home.

Parents don’t have the proper training or luxury of having trained staff members at their homes. Oftentimes, student aggressive behaviors occur at home and are not redirected or addressed, then these same behaviors are transitioned into the school setting, due to lack of proper parenting support and supervision at home. This has posed lots of behavioral issues for staff members who have the students while at school. The majority of the participants agreed that this has become one of the main reasons and issues while students are at school. Jeremy stated,

The unfortunate thing that I noticed though, is that when they're at that age, at a younger age, is that like the kids are manageable, so they're not as severe. They're not as dangerous because they're smaller. And then when they're big and they're unable to

manage, of course they're going to need more people in there because there's more physical harm.

All 10 participants agreed that this has been a growing trend and parents need help and assistance, which is not always provided. Wayne stated, "Yeah, parents are the vocal point in assessing early treatments." Lea added, "Yeah, it all starts at home, home, home." Kay commented,

I think too, we need to find ways to assist our parents better because the parents are part of the team as well and they can either make our jobs more difficult or they can make them easier. We have parents that are willing to work with us and then parents that find fault and everything we do, but they are part of the team and a lot of the times I don't think that they feel like they're a part of the team. They think it's again us against them or them against us. So, I think we need to work better with them on how we can integrate them and being a part of the team.

Parenting support and caring for children with special needs can, at times, be overwhelming, as both parents and educators need to work together for the betterment of the student. The participants agreed that parents are just as much a part of students' success at school, as well as, teachers being a part of students' success at home.

Research Questions Responses

This chapter provided a description of the research results describing the experiences of using multiple forms of non-verbal interventions simultaneously to decrease physical aggression and self-injurious behaviors for special education staff members in self-contained classrooms. The results were presented as they addressed the one central research question and two sub-questions. The data collection included online surveys, interviews, and focus group session. In

the next section, I present answers to each of the research questions with supporting data from the participants of the study as follows.

Central Research Question

What are special education staff members' experiences of using multiple forms of non-verbal interventions simultaneously to decrease physical aggression and self-injurious behaviors in self-contained classrooms? All ten participants agreed that utilizing multiple forms of non-verbal interventions simultaneously decreased physical aggression and SIB. Ron stated, "I used them all throughout the course of the day." Marie added, "I consistently used them all day long." Multiple forms of non-verbal interventions when used simultaneously are aimed at quietly, privately, and respectfully decreasing students undesired crisis behaviors from occurring or escalating in self-contained classrooms.

Wayne commented, "In a self-contained classroom setting, educators often use various forms of non-verbal interventions frequently throughout the day to support communication, learning, and behavior management." When responding to how often she utilizes multiple forms of non-verbal interventions in her classroom, Lea replied, "I utilize non-verbal interventions every single day." Many of the other participants agreed with the effectiveness of non-verbal interventions. Alberto stated, "Nonverbal interventions are used daily in self-contained classrooms." Louise stated, "I use various forms of non-verbal interventions often and daily in my position." Jeremy agreed to the importance of using multiple forms of non-verbal interventions simultaneously. He stated, "I use various forms of non-verbal interventions in a self-contained classroom setting 85 to 98% of the time."

Sub-Question One

Which non-verbal interventions do special education staff find most effective for non-verbal or minimally verbal students with ASD, physical aggression, and SIB in self-contained classrooms? Overwhelmingly, 90% of participants chose teacher/student relationship as the most important non-verbal intervention for working with NV/MV students with ASD, physical aggression, and SIB, followed secondly by facial affect recognition at 6%, and thirdly CPI at 4%, respectively.

Lea stated, “Developing a positive and trusting relationship is crucial for a successful self-contained classroom.” Although most students are NV/MV, it doesn’t mean that they can’t effectively communicate through their high-fives, laughter, hugs, smiles, body language and proximity; it simply means they can’t say in a full complete sentence or paragraph that I love you too and thanks for being my teacher. A positive teacher/student relationship entails establishing a welcoming environment where kids feel free to express themselves. Michael added, “Teachers can form stronger relationships with students and build rapport in these self-contained environments which can help motivate students to participate and be successful.”

Sub-Question Two

How prepared do secondary special education staff members feel they are at utilizing non-verbal interventions in the self-contained classroom? The participants’ perspective on being prepared at utilizing non-verbal interventions were stated in many different ways. Michael stated, “This is relatively easy if trained and utilized/practiced regularly with your students.” Ron added, “I see it being easy.” Kay stated, “Initially, it wasn't easy. It takes time and consistency to develop the ease of using multiple forms of non-verbal interventions in a self-contained

classroom environment.” When utilizing or implementing non-verbal interventions, they’re just like developing or replacing a new skill or trade, and it requires time and practice.

Two participants, Louise and Jonee, added other variables to consider regarding being prepared at utilizing non-verbal interventions. Jonee stated, “The use of nonverbal interventions is based on situational events. It might be easier in some situations compared to others.” Louise added, “It is easier to use these forms of non-verbal interventions in a smaller setting or self-contained classroom because is less of an audience or distraction to other learners or staff in larger settings such as Gen Ed.” Overall, the majority of participants’ perspectives on utilizing non-verbal interventions were summed up by one participant’s comment. Lea stated, “It’s almost second nature to me now. We utilize these forms of communication so much we’re not even aware we’re doing it.”

Summary

This chapter provided a description of the research results and sought to answer the research questions and sub-questions based on participants’ perspectives of using multiple forms of non-verbal interventions simultaneously decreased physical aggression and self-injurious behaviors for special education staff members in self-contained classrooms. Data was collected from all ten participants, based on thematic analysis. The findings from the data codes emerged and produced the following themes, subthemes, and outliers. Theme one, communication deficits between NV/MV students and staff with subthemes: non-verbal approaches, frustration, patience, and consistency. Theme two, relationship building is paramount when working with all students with subthemes: our students deserve better, trust and rapport, confidence, and commitment. Theme three, safety first, with subthemes: students’ and staff safety, teamwork and

CPI-as a last resort; and the following outlier emerged parenting NV/MV students with behaviors at an early age.

In conclusion, the participants were allowed to describe and share their perspectives on the research topic openly and honestly without any prejudgments or assumptions, or bias; as prominent themes emerged and sub-themes became clearer during all data collection processes. Most of the participants were candid initially, but then relaxed and loosen up as the data collection methods continued. Some of the participants showed deep emotions as they expressed their responses, bridging their lived experiences, first-hand knowledge, and their insider points of view to a phenomenon that is well worth studying. Researchers have investigated specific types of antecedents and consequences that trigger and later maintain behaviors and have found that these typically can be attributed to the actions of other people in the vicinity (Edelson, 2022). It is, therefore, imperative that special educators be trained to successfully and effectively implement these multiple forms of non-verbal interventions simultaneously to ultimately help improve students' overall well-being regarding their significance in life, future productivity, and individual contributions to society.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative single intrinsic case study was to describe the experiences of using multiple forms of non-verbal interventions simultaneously to decrease physical aggression and self-injurious behaviors for special education staff members in self-contained classrooms. Chapter Five consists of the five discussion subsections: (a) interpretation of findings, (b) implications for practice, (c) theoretical, methodological, and empirical implications, (d) limitations and delimitations, and (e) recommendations for future research.

Discussion

Violence in schools against teachers and students impacts student learning and engagement. Prior research indicated that two of the most challenging behaviors exhibited by individuals on the autism spectrum are self-injurious behavior (SIB) and aggression (Edelson, 2021). According to Edelson (2021), SIB often leads to some form of tissue damage, such as redness, bruises, lacerations, and, in severe cases, bone fractures. This research study contributed to the existing body of literature by exploring ten participants first-hand knowledge and lived experiences as they shared essential insights and gave guidance to the effectiveness of using multiple forms of non-verbal interventions simultaneously with NV/MV secondary students with ASD, whose target behaviors are physical aggression and SIB. Teaching is a relentless and demanding job. It is particularly demanding when teachers are expected to consistently implement complex, high-impact teaching practices (Li, & Olsen, 2022). Thus, Oakley et al. (2022) suggest that interventions for improving social communication in autism should not only focus on social skills, such as other-facial expressions (OFE) recognition, but also self-emotional awareness, such as self-facial expressions (SFE) recognition.

Crisis behaviors, like physical aggression and self-injurious behaviors are at the forefront and a priority in school districts across America. This is even more emphasized to a higher degree, when it involves NV/MV secondary special education students with ASD. However, participants in this study confirmed and added to other bodies of literature that by utilizing multiple forms of non-verbal interventions simultaneously decreased physical aggression and SIB thus, there is a need to understand how best to combine, sequence, and individualize social skills interventions to meet the heterogeneous needs of these children (Kasari et al., 2021). One of the atypical ways symptoms of psychiatric disorder may manifest in individuals with ASD and ID is as “challenging” behaviors, including self-injurious behaviors (SIB) (Rittmannsberger et al. 2020, Painter et al. 2018, Bitsika et al. 2016, Rzepecka et al. 2011).

There are significant gaps in the literature regarding the need of utilizing multiple forms of non-verbal interventions simultaneously to decrease physical aggression and self-injurious behaviors for NV/MV secondary students with ASD. According to Baweja et al. (2023), children with ASD and other comorbidities such as attention deficit hyperactive disorder exhibit physical aggression and self-injurious behaviors at a higher rate, making interventions necessary.

Specifically, non-verbal interventions like the teacher/student relationship, facial affect recognition, and CPI-training were all important components and key elements in decreasing physical aggression and SIBs in NV/MV secondary special education students with ASD. As research has shown, individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) have a higher prevalence of behavior that interferes with adaptive development (e.g., aggression, self-injury, disruption) compared to individuals without ASD. Prevalence estimates vary based on the measurement system and sample, but large-scale studies suggest that 36 % of youth with ASD engage

in aggressive behavior (Edelson, 2021), 42 % in self-injury (Steenfeldt-Kristensen et al., 2020), and 12 % have comorbid disruptive/impulse-control/conduct disorders (Lai et al., 2019).

The results of this research study built upon previous research, which indicated the further need to explore participants experiences, effectiveness, and preparedness of utilizing multiple forms of non-verbal interventions simultaneously with regards to the research questions. This research study attempted to fill this gap and described special education staff members' perceptions on utilizing multiple forms of non-verbal interventions simultaneously for this population of students in a self-contained classroom; to further enhance the current knowledge and better understanding of the phenomenon. A review of the findings, discussion, implications, and recommendations for future research are discussed in the following sections.

Summary of Thematic Findings

The thematic findings emerged from the participants responses of the data using the thematic analysis (TA) approach. The results from the thematic analysis led to three recurring themes from the online surveys, individual interviews, and the focus group discussion-data regarding the research questions. The following themes emerged with regards to the review of the data. Three principal themes discovered in this study are as follows: (a) communication deficits between NV/MV students and staff, (b) relationship building is paramount when working with students, and (c) safety first. Each theme represents a significant aspect of the teachers' perceptions of utilizing multiple forms of non-verbal interventions simultaneously in a self-contained classroom. I used the six-step process suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) to identify, analyze, organize, describe, and finalize the themes generated from the data. Repeated patterns emerged regarding the central research question as all participants consistently and on a daily basis utilized multiple forms of non-verbal interventions.

The analysis highlighted that communication deficits between NV/MV students and staff is what the majority of the participants identified as the most recurring theme that emerged regarding the data. Subsequently, staff communication barriers are only made more difficult when there is a language deficit with regards to their NV/MV students. Participants had to identify and implement other forms of non-verbal communication approaches that were deemed effective in producing progress with their NV/MV students. These communication deficits led to participants feeling frustration at times; however, through their persistence and consistency, they were able to endure and made significant progress one step at a time.

The next emerging theme that participants identified and emerged consistently through the data analysis was relationship building is paramount when working with students. Establishing a positive relationship between the teacher and student should seem to be an effortless task; however, when other contributory factors such as physical aggression and SIB are at risk, the task at times can become quite daunting. However, when participants demonstrate through their hard work and love of teaching students who deserve opportunities to become better despite their disabilities, it produces not only confidence and commitment in staff members, it also builds a special trust and rapport with their students.

The last emerging theme that was produced through the data analysis was a repeated and consistent theme of safety first. This theme was well discussed and addressed throughout the participants response as they shared their significant role towards student and staff safety. All staff members agreed that the use of CPI-as a last resort is crucial in preventing or stopping injuries that may occur between students or staff. However, teamwork is instrumental along with being properly trained in utilizing crisis prevention intervention techniques and strategies. Staff members being able and prepared to implement various forms of effective non-verbal

interventions are placing a growing emphasis on how safety and protective measures are being utilized daily in today's self-contained classrooms.

Interpretation of Findings

The interpretations of findings as discussed in Chapter Four were based on the 10 participants' lived experiences from working with NV/MV secondary special education students with ASD, whose target behaviors are physical aggression and SIB. To better understand their utilization and effectiveness of using multiple forms of non-verbal interventions simultaneously in a self-contained classroom environment, it is essential to understand the daily environment of these special educators. All ten participants' main goal as educators is to provide a safe and engaging learning environment. They utilized various forms of non-verbal intervention strategies and practices that helped them provide the additional safety, security, and comfort that their students needed to thrive and be successful. These practices are associated with increasing the comfort, security, and well-being of students at school and can be applied by caretakers and educators to improve the learning experience (Feng & Zhong, 2021).

The majority of participants shared that oftentimes due to communication deficits between students and staff that implementation of some forms of non-verbal approaches were difficult at times, which led to participants feeling frustrated. However, while some participants shared this belief of being frustrated, they also shared that through their commitment, patience, and consistency, this proved to be key elements involving student's overall success. All the participants' goals were aimed on producing positive solutions to the communication deficits by being creative in their interventions.

Another key finding that was identified in the fight against physical aggression and self-injurious behaviors in NV/MV secondary special education students with ASD was the

“Teacher/Student” relationship. It is a powerful tool, and when used effectively, it can not only impact the learning environment but also impact the lives of others. Like many other areas of concern regarding students’ safety and well-being, disabilities like ASD, play major roles in students’ conduct and how they behave. Therefore, it is important that teachers have autism awareness (Yazıcı, & Baş, 2023). These key attributes demonstrated by the participants helped to build trust, establish rapport, and instill confidence in the classroom environment.

Safety first was not only echoed throughout this study, it was highlighted in each individual participant’s heart as they shared their passion and compassion for both students and staff safety. Participants stated they were hit, kicked, punched, or injured at some point in time. All of these behaviors vary in frequency, duration, and severity across the autism spectrum (Edelson, 2022). Moreover, when the participants talked about Crisis Prevention Intervention, and it being used as a last resort for student and staff safety, it struck a delicate cord with some of the participants, due to the nature of restraints. These are some of the challenges special educators face daily on their jobs for the ultimate pursuit of their students to have better lives.

Communication Deficits between NV/MV Students and Staff

This study revealed that in addition to other research studies highlighting deficits in communication by NV/MV students with ASD, participants shared that communication deficits were a key point of frustration, which oftentimes lead to crisis behaviors and adaptation by special education schoolteachers’ perception of ASD and the way of communication that they use with the affected children is crucial (Eltyeb et al., 2023). On the other hand, McKinney et al. (2021) applied non-verbal forms of interventions simultaneously with successful results in decreasing physical aggression in non-verbal secondary special education students with autism in a self-contained classroom. Most of the participants acknowledged that lack of communication

can pose unforeseen problems and issues for students with little to no communication in the learning environment.

Aligning with prior research, communication deficits affect and impact learning and cause a variety of language barriers associated with students with disabilities and play significant roles in how it impacts society when communication deficits accompany and/or give rise to aggressive behavior, children with ASD may be at a particularly heightened risk of social difficulties (Kalvin et al., 2023). These factors have included: the presence of autism (Mazurek et al., 2013; Nicholls et al., 2020), lower levels of adaptive skills (Nicholls et al., 2020), lower levels of communication skills (Kiernan & Kiernan, 1994), severity of intellectual disability (Murphy et al., 2009), and deprivation experienced by the child's family (Nicholls et al., 2020).

In the existing literature, progress has been made with regards to communication obstacles, but little to no information is available between NV/MV secondary students who demonstrates crisis behaviors against staff, and for generations, professionals have struggled to find appropriate ways to deal with the problem behaviors of students with autism in the classroom (Almutlaq, 2021). There are non-verbal interventions available and, when used simultaneously with fidelity, can oftentimes ease the difficult transitions between the NV/MV students who lack sufficient language skills in order to communicate more effectively with the staff members. Lack of adequate communication skills can hinder student and staff progress, especially when working with NV/MV secondary special education students with ASD, physical aggression, and SIB. Besides, Kalvin et al. (2020) note that the combination of anxiety and ASD has been linked to a notable increase in physical aggression as children diagnosed with both experience high rates of irritability that leads to SIB and physical aggressiveness.

The study findings extend the research regarding interventions on physical aggression, which have focused primarily on younger children while limited interventions exist for older students. Brignell et al. (2018) explain that there is an increased need for interventions focused on older children since the evidence shows most research is focused on minimally verbal children. Past and current research indicates that with ASD numbers on the rise, specific interventions that are geared to decrease physical aggression and SIB are of the utmost importance in moving forward and adding to the existing body of literature (Harris, 2023). Brignell et al. (2018) linked the phenomenon with limited teacher training, inadequate resources, and limited interest that limit interest in intervening for older minimally verbal students. However, the last decade has seen a growth of interest in research for autistic children with profound communication difficulties (McKinney et al., 2021).

The results of the current study furthered this concept, as the participants of this study also shared that sometimes words aren't always needed to get your message or your point across. Non-verbal forms of communication are used every day in the learning environment with success; therefore, interventions for aggressive behaviors in children and adolescents with ASD are critical, not only to improve their social interactions, but also to keep them safe and protected (Jung & Lee, 2020). Therefore, a child with autism may not speak but still be able to count blocks, draw shapes, or complete other tasks that are further along developmental assessments normed with typically developing children (McKinney et al., 2021).

Relationship Building is Paramount When Working with All Students

The idea that teachers require the capacity to build positive, supportive relationships with students is widely recognized today (Aspelin et al., 2021). This study's results are consistent with previous research and how important it is obtaining, training, and keeping good teachers

due to persistent shortage of credentialed special education teachers (SETs) in the United States continues to exist (Peyton et al., 2020), and teacher attrition has long been identified as a challenge for educational systems worldwide (Elyashiv, 2019). Therefore, relationship building is a positive worthwhile endeavor to establish within the walls of a nurturing and safe classroom environment.

This research study confirmed prior research since the importance of strong teacher-student relationships has received growing attention (Roorda et al., 2011; Longobardi et al., 2021; Meng, 2021; Derakhshan, 2022b; Fabris et al., 2023; Forsberg et al., 2023). All ten participants wholeheartedly agreed that a teacher/student relationship is an important non-verbal intervention tool and, when used simultaneously, is effective with NV/MV secondary students with ASD, in decreasing physical aggression, and SIB; and makes a positive impact on the teacher and students. Just as positive TSRs may increase student motivation, positive TSRs may also increase teacher motivation, effort, engagement, happiness, and confidence, which in turn may result in greater use of complex, high-impact teaching practices (van der Lans et al., 2020).

This study is similar to previous findings indicating that positive relationship-building skills and opportunities to learn and be able to participate with others are crucial and key principals that not only affect the student and staff by having peer relationships and having possibilities to participate are essential to every child (Chen et al. 2020, 2019; Foley et al. 2012; Moore-Dean, Renwick, and Schormans 2016). This is truly modeled in the participants regarding this study. However, when students' and teacher's needs are not met, this oftentimes leads to other negative contributory factors in the learning environment with regard to child behavior problems having been consistently shown to contribute to higher levels of teacher stress, lower levels of teaching efficacy, and poorer student-teacher relationship quality (Eisenhower, 2015;

Herman et al., 2018; 2020). Therefore, the participants of this study indicated and confirmed prior research that the teacher/student relationship, when used effectively, is indeed a powerful positive non-verbal intervention used to decrease crisis and challenging behaviors. As previous studies have shown that when teachers initiate and foster positive and healthy relationships in the classrooms, students thrive (Collie & Perry, 2019).

Safety First

Previous research indicates that challenges with emotion dysregulation, self-injurious behavior (SIB), and aggression are common in autistic individuals (Vasile et al., 2023). CPI, is an intervention used to protect self or others. The results of this research study corroborated previous findings regarding student and staff safety. More recent research indicates that children with a diagnosis of ASD and intellectual disability continue to experience higher rates of restraint compared to those without those diagnoses (O'Donoghue et al., 2020). This may be due to characteristics in children with ASD. Severe behavior, such as aggression, self-injury, and property destruction, is more common in individuals with ASD than their neurotypical peers (Newcomb & Hagopian, 2018).

Therefore, by using CPI effectively, it gave participants the necessary skills and training needed to support students in crisis settings. "CPI is designed to help professionals in any setting provide the best possible Care, Welfare, Safety, and Security" (Crisis Prevention Institute, n.d.). Hence, serious acts of violence against teachers have been found to affect their performance at school and can lead to absenteeism due to fear and safety concerns (Dirzyte et al., 2024).

During this study, the majority of the participants agreed that CPI is a necessary evil when working with NV/MV secondary special education students with ASD, physical aggression, and SIB. Crisis prevention institute (CPI) is an evidence-based crisis prevention

program that helps to benefit workers who work with individuals with challenging and crisis behaviors. One participant shared, "it's not a matter of if a physical attack from a student will occur, it's more of a matter of when it will occur." Nonetheless, restraint is still used in institutional, residential, day habilitation, vocational, and school settings (Salvatore et al., 2022). Prior research indicates these results did not appear to differ with regard to classroom safety as a percentage of individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities engage in severe, dangerous, challenging behaviors (Stevenson et al., 2019), which can oftentimes lead to student and staff injuries. However, Crisis intervention has strengths and limitations when applied to students with disabilities who exhibit severe challenging behavior (Stevenson et al., 2019).

This study addressed divergence from existing research with regards to participants' perspectives regarding the fact that most secondary students are bigger, stronger, and can cause significantly greater amounts of harm and injury to staff and their peers, compared to much smaller elementary school students. One of the participants shared her thoughts on some of the physical obstacles regarding the mere size and strength that some of these students possess when they are angry. Marie stated, "Some staff members cannot handle a six-foot-four 250-pound dude...who is out of control." Jonee stated, "No one wants to get beat up and bruised." Another staff member, Lea shared, "I'm only five foot."

This research study extended further findings that other intervention approaches may be needed to provide adequate means of safety measures when students' size and other physical attributes are considered. However, such an attempt to prevent or control the aggressive behavior of people with autism may have the opposite of the intended effect, thereby calling for more therapeutic interventions (Jung & Lee, 2020). Thus, it is clear that aggressive behaviors represent

a serious challenge for autistic youth across multiple levels of their functioning, potentially across the lifespan (Quetsch et al., 2023).

All 10 participants shared that they have been physically attacked by students multiple times; thus, relying on an effective and safe non-verbal intervention like CPI to protect themselves and others. While most participants of this study revealed that they did not experience major injuries or harm, female participants acknowledged their concerns regarding aggressive secondary students. One female participant stated, “When there's a crisis and there may only be one staff member or two staff members and two staff members cannot handle the six-foot-four 250-pound dude, yeah, we all have to help.” Safety concerns are real issues when working with this population of students, but non-verbal interventions, like CPI, assist participants and others recognizing, preventing, and then managing crisis behavior by NV/MV secondary special education students with ASD, in self-contained classroom environments.

This study confirmed prior literature regarding student and staff safety and being able to protect oneself, their students, and other co-workers brings self-confidence, reassurance, and competency where physical aggression and self-injurious behaviors are commonplace in the learning environment as aggressive behaviors can lead to injuries to others and typically involve hitting, biting, and hair-pulling (Edelson, 2021). Nevertheless, without appropriate training on how to effectively serve this student population, the threat of imminent harm puts teachers at unnecessary risks that many educators are not willing to take (Akman, 2021). Furthermore, this study also indicates that it may be unrealistic to expect practitioners without extensive training in behavior analysis (e.g., special education teachers, paraprofessionals) to be able to implement these strategies with fidelity, even though in practice, they are regularly tasked with serving these individuals (Stevenson et al., 2019).

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings from the current research study reveal several implications for special education staff members, families, and school district trainings for professional development days. Participants discussed in detail the implications for common practices and policies that would promote consistently, decrease crisis behaviors, enhance student learning and safety regarding in the classroom by students with autism who have been associated with demonstrating challenging behaviors and self-injurious acts against themselves and others in the classroom environment continually (Baweja et al., 2023).

In addition to staff members' overall mental and physical health and stability, family involvement and care played a major role in not only protecting students and providing for their students, but also protecting and providing for staff members in and out of the classrooms. Family members play a significant role in the overall well-being of staff members, as they are also affected by their jobs. However, traditional teaching and teachers have to ultimately find a core balance on how they now conduct their academic classrooms and manage crisis behaviors, which adds to their frustration in certain areas and disciplines of study (Park & Ramirez, 2022).

Finally, many participants shared their insights on providing additional specialized trainings policies and procedures that impact professional development and add to individual and team growth. Therefore, it is vital for school district to provide additional specialized training in areas of need to better equip educators and give them a broader and deeper understanding of teacher perspectives on such behaviors may provide administrators with valuable information as well as knowledge on the support teachers need (Almutlaq, 2021). These following implications for both policy and practice are discussed in the following sections.

Implications for Policy

The research findings from the participants' perspectives outlined key policies and procedures for school districts and administrators regarding professional development training that may have a significant effect and impact on school policies. How school districts identify and implement policies through the immediate needs and concerns for overall student and staff safety were discussed. Research literature in the field of education and behavior found that districts are not only accountable for providing certain interventions when disciplining students identified with special needs but also it is best practices (Albert, 2020). This research through the participants voiced shared their ideas and the importance of crafting policies directly aimed at trainings that will better prepare educators to perform their jobs. This study found implications for school district trainings that are discussed in the next sections.

Implications for School District Training

This study revealed common participants' viewpoints on school district training regarding policy and procedures. This reflected the need for more school districts to focus on trainings that are more specifically aimed toward individual student program design and purpose. The majority of participants were quick to point out school district training with regard to special education students should be directly related to that specific population, so specific educators will be able to better understand and directly apply the learned knowledge to the specific student audiences. This leads to school districts being able to provide the needed resources and materials that participants need to be effective and successful in their classrooms. However, it may be unrealistic to expect practitioners without extensive training in behavior analysis (e.g., special education teachers, paraprofessionals) to be able to implement these strategies with fidelity, even

though in practice they are regularly tasked with serving these individuals (Stevenson et al., 2019).

However, some participants mentioned that some programs in school districts get less funding and receive less attention than other programs. A majority of the participants echoed and agreed that school districts' policies should change to fit the current needs of the staff and students. As Ron pointed out, "materials and resources cost money, but so does losing staff to injuries and workers compensation, and having to then find and train, new staff." Autism and the need for more training on autism awareness is a major concern as it is one of the fastest growing disabilities in schools today. However, with the growing need regarding safety concerns in students with ASD, it is challenging to assess the physical aggression of children with autism and complex needs within the learning environment (McKinney et al. 2021). Therefore, school districts should provide ongoing support through district initiatives that empower educators to be successful and effective when it comes to students with disabilities.

School districts must make people's health and welfare a top priority. It really does make a difference to staff members when stakeholders, board members, and school administrators take the time to provide the necessary training tools and crisis prevention interventions needed to be effective and successful in the classroom environment. When school districts train staff properly using CPI, there is a "90% Reduction in incidents of assault, up to 100% reduction in restraints, 82% reduction in workers' comp claims." (Crisis Prevention Institute, n.d.). Student and staff safety should not be merely a policy; it should be a top priority.

Implications for Practice

The findings from this research took aim at the need for special education staff members to actively participate in practical applications that enhance and supports the use of non-verbal interventions aimed at decreasing student crisis behaviors, while maintaining safety within and around their learning environment. This study found practical implications for staff members and family discussed in the following sections.

Implications for Staff Members

In this research study, there were practical implications for staff members regarding overall health, wellness, and stability. Participants of this study shared equally that it takes a special kind of special education staff member to want to be in this type of educational setting and apply learned knowledge and implement interventions that are safe for students and learning. This type of job is not for everyone, supporting the idea that many great special education staff members are not made; they are born. Teachers and staff members want to come to work with the idea and concepts of helping students learn, making learning fun and engaging, and fulfilling both personal and professional goals and objectives.

However, some participants shared it can be an uphill battle when working with students with severe behavioral challenges and disabilities. Marie remarked, “You know, we always have to have patience, and no matter how bad of a day, that we may personally be having as staff.” Teachers will experience crisis in their own homes and families, whether going through physical, emotional, financial, or other types of life situations. Life happens. Teachers must be prepared to take care of their home. Numerous studies have revealed that teachers who experience mistreatment at their workplace may suffer from stress, anxiety, depression, burnout (Ghadban et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2024; Chirico et al., 2021), and a decline in overall psychological well-

being (Barr et al., 2022), so the impact of teacher victimization extends beyond the professional realm. Therefore, staff members need to find productive and positive outlets to prevent staff burnout and frustrations outside the classroom environment. Lea added, “You also have to be non-reactive when things happened and come in there with an understanding that it's not about you.”

Staff members are recommended and encouraged to take personal and professional breaks as needed. This prevents teacher burnout and retention. Staff members are also encouraged to seek additional teacher training in other areas outside of their certification areas, as to become familiar with other student disabilities or diagnoses. In addition, staff members are encouraged to seek out personal knowledge and information from other youth organizations or government agencies, as this information is oftentimes free to educators or the public.

Implications for Families

Participants need to find healthy outlets and alternatives outside of the school environment that involve creating a healthy work-life balance with family. Jobs that are very stressful and significantly impact one's emotional and physical states of well-being require adequate time away from the job to do something positive and enjoyable. This could be with family and friends. Participants discussed the emotional tolls this type of work has on individuals. One female participant shared, “My husband told me to make a choice, either transfer or quit; I can't see you come home anymore being emotionally and physically drained to the point where you simply collapse when you get home.” Victimized teachers are more likely to suffer from psychological distress, impaired personal relationships, and heightened fear, all of which harm job performance and relationships with students (Moon et al., 2021).

Families go through the trials and tribulations just as the participants do. It not only impacts educators but also their families. Michael stated, “I can speak from being in this position before. I have been punched in the face, kicked in the shin, and scratched at various times.” Injuries, wounds, and damage to staff members are real, and this impacts family members who provide care for the staff members at home.

Participants went through divorces, lost loved ones, and had to endure nagging injuries, surgeries, and bruises that lasted well over the holidays, spring breaks, and through the summer seasons. While family is of the utmost importance, participants shared their feelings regarding the students they not only teach, but care for too. Marie stated, “Autism has such a wide spectrum each student is individual... I think every child deserves a chance. They need to feel loved, understood and appreciated.” That is what family is all about.

Staff members and their spouses or significant others are recommended and encouraged to seek family counseling together. This can be in the form of formal or informal counseling. Counseling allows for individual and group discussions regarding job, home, or other personal or professional issues and concerns. Informal counseling can come via a trusted friend or pastor or co-worker. Formal counseling can come through school-related insurances and recommendations via school counselor or district representative. These healthy family choices allow for staff members to seek out additional help if needed.

Empirical and Theoretical Implications

The empirical and theoretical implications regarding this study are discussed in the following sections. The theory that grounded and served as framework for this study was BF Skinners (1976) behaviorism theory. This framework facilitates the perceptions of special education staff members' utilization of multiple forms of non-verbal interventions

simultaneously in a self-contained classroom to decrease physically aggressive and self-injurious behaviors in NV/MV secondary students with ASD. Through this lens, the study validates not only staff members' utilization of multiple forms of non-verbal interventions to decrease student's crisis and self-injurious behaviors but also contributed valuable insights and provided in-depth analogies on lived experiences, personal and professional knowledge, and their increased learning to promote both student and staff safety in the learning environment. When the individual professional is to be recruited, characteristics such as attitude or interest, prior experiences, cognitive abilities, and learning styles will all have an impact (Wanna et al., 2021).

Empirical Implications

Through the behaviorism theory lens, which suggests that all behavior is a form of communication and when a bit of behavior has the kind of consequences called reinforcing, it is more likely to occur again (Skinner, 1976). This study highlights and aligns with past research in understanding ASD and the characteristics of students with autism, and as educators, it is paramount to understand how to best support students on the autism spectrum (Johnson & Gutierrez de Blume, 2021).

The study's findings highlighted positive teacher/student relationships by exploring already established approaches to aggression management in children and adolescents with autism based on specialized teachers' perceptions and intervention practices, as noted worthwhile (Jung & Lee, 2020). Previous studies have shown that when teachers initiate and foster positive and healthy relationships in the classrooms, students thrive (Collie & Perry, 2019). Therefore, it is crucial to not only hire highly skilled and trained individuals but also individuals who have a heart for learning and understanding students with special needs and disabilities.

This study revealed that facial affect recognition training is an important non-verbal intervention and when utilized appropriately decreased crisis behaviors through significant facial features that generally include teachers' eye contact, facial expressions, voice variations, and hand gestures, etc. (Peng et al., 2022). Not bringing a lot of attention to behaviors can significantly decrease the chances of crisis behaviors occurring and being able to quickly assess and recognize these facial features and factors could be the difference between staff being preventative and proactive or staff having to deal with the repercussions of injuries or damage caused by students' dangerous behaviors and outbursts (Dollion et al., 2022).

CPI is a non-verbal intervention that supports student and staff safety. This study not only enhances teachers' knowledge of utilizing multiple forms of non-verbal interventions effectively through CPI, it employs critical de-escalation methods of non-verbal interventions to combat aggressive behaviors that teach how to decrease the probability of such behaviors from occurring or occurring to a lesser degree (Stine, 2020). This is crucial when working with students with physical aggression and SIB.

The empirical knowledge gained from this study emphasizes the importance of understanding NV/MV secondary students and the growing rate and percentage of individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities engage in severe, dangerous challenging behaviors (Stevenson et al., 2019). Therefore, it is paramount that educators are being well-equipped to handle the everyday job duties and safety concerns associated with this population of students. Application of systems to address behavior on a schoolwide level could simplify training, increase staffing flexibility, and decrease the use of crisis response procedures (Minkos et al., 2023).

Theoretical Implications

The research confirms and extends existing literature based on BF Skinner's Behaviorism Theory (1967) by focusing on the utilization of multiple forms of non-verbal interventions used simultaneously to decrease behaviors in NV/MV secondary students with ASD. This study corroborates the findings of prior research emphasizing a substantial proportion of autistic individuals exhibit aggressive behaviors and/or SIB (Northrup et al., 2022). Other studies indicate that estimates for the prevalence of these behaviors in autistic individuals vary widely across studies but fall somewhere between 30 and 50% for self-injurious behaviors (Steenfeldt-Kristensen et al., 2020) and between 10 and 58% for physical aggression toward others (Mazurek, 2020), with variability likely due to differences in sample characteristics and definitions of aggression.

The study reinforces that non-verbal interventions, relationship building, facial affect recognition, and CPI-training affect and impact an individual's environment and how all actions are interconnected. However, little to no research utilizing two or more non-verbal interventions has been primarily focused on with regards to NV/MV secondary students with ASD in addition to approximately 30% of children with autism are non-verbal or minimally verbal (Tager-Flusberg & Kasari, 2013) and 33% have an ID (Maenner et al., 2020).

Although challenges in social communication are central to a diagnosis of ASD, children's strengths and needs vary substantially; therefore, it is unlikely that a single intervention will be effective for all children (Kasari et al., 2021). These statistics influence school districts, staff members, and stakeholders to embrace and accept new methods of policies and procedures regarding non-verbal interventions that are effective in the fight against student and staff safety in the classroom environment.

The present study diverges from previous research by taking an in-depth look and deep analysis of multiple non-verbal interventions utilized simultaneously by special educators to decrease student aggression and SIB while promoting student and staff safety. Past research has shown while there are multiple types of interventions—and at multiple levels (e.g., school, classroom, individual) of intervention—to support children’s social skills, few have been tested alone or in combination with other interventions when applied in authentic and inclusive school contexts (Kasari et al., 2021); therefore, there is a need to understand how best to combine, sequence, and individualize social skills interventions to meet the heterogeneous needs of these children.

This study extends the conversation around non-verbal interventions, specifically relationship building, facial affect recognition, and CPI-training, provided valuable insights, and enhanced BF Skinner’s behaviorism theory by utilizing triangulation when implementing three intervention methods at once creating a stronger alliance of three different methods of data collection. This nuanced understanding underscores the complexity and simplicity by suggesting that flexibility and versatility are crucial elements seen through special educator lens capturing their perspective may be a major purpose of a qualitative study (Yin, 2014).

Limitations and Delimitations

There was several limitations and delimitations in this study that were identified regarding special education staff members’ perspectives as recognized through the data collection methods. These limitations and delimitations are discussed in the following sections.

Limitations

Limitations for this study included researcher bias, participant pool, identification of specific disabilities, and specific targeted behaviors. Researcher bias was a limitation due to the researcher being a former special educator with almost 30 years of experience and knowledge in the field of special education. A purposive sampling method was used, which limited the participation sample size due to the research topic and diversity of participants. Another limitation of this study is the findings are based on a targeted group of students with disabilities with targeted behaviors – specifically secondary NV/MV students with autism who display physical aggression and self-injurious behaviors. These limitations were identified as each having and playing a significant role in the research process.

Delimitations

This study was delimited by age as each participant was at least 21 years of age which is based on the school district's requirement and policy when hiring staff. Participants had worked at least one year in special education and had experience working with NV/MV secondary students with ASD whose target behaviors were physical aggression and SIB. The reasoning for these delimitations were to clearly select participants who had lived experiences and first-hand knowledge working at least one year with this specific population of students. The field of special education was also chosen as a delimitation as each student was in special education programs and diagnosed with ASD at the time. A single intrinsic case study was a delimitation chosen over other case studies as it zooms in on the unique subject matter and focuses on the subject itself as the primary interest.

Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendations for future research are discussed in further detail regarding the findings of this research study. The recommendations are that future studies should focus on other student populations with other disabilities. This includes elementary school students with other disabilities, diagnosis, or disorders (ED, LD, OHI) as well as students who may identify with other genders, specific age groups, or other groups of students who may be diagnosed with physical aggression and SIB.

Future research should focus on other different and diversified ethnic groups of students, students who live outside of Texas or other states, and groups of students who may be in other youth and child care centers or facilities. Other identifiable groups of students should be studied further for future advancement and to enhance and bring added knowledge to other students, parents, school districts, and communities regarding the field of special education.

Gaps in the literature for future research studies should also focus on the parents/guardians who have children with ASD who are NV/MV and exhibit aggression and self-injurious behaviors. There may be many contributory factors that are associated with how these parents/guardians are supporting their children that may play significant roles and provide additional knowledge that may be vital moving forward in future research.

First, future studies should focus on other disabilities, while ASD is the fastest growing disability today, it is not the only one. In addition, other age groups should be studied to shed light on the growing number of students with varying levels of communication, cognitive abilities, and other significant disabilities or disorders. Lastly, future research should focus on the parent/guardian who have been supporting and caring for this population of students, as early childhood detection is vital in the case of faster assistance and supports.

These future recommendations for using non-verbal interventions simultaneously may prove vital, effective, and successful moving forward by describing and exploring other possible participants' lived experiences and first-hand knowledge to subject matters that still needs revisions and corrections, therefore providing children/students and parents better opportunities learn, live, and conduct themselves in educational and societal settings.

Conclusion

This qualitative study focused on the vital need for understanding special education educators' lived experiences and perceptions that were highly evident through the research findings associated with the participant data. The findings supported the themes and indicated that by using multiple-forms of non-verbal interventions simultaneously, teacher/student relationship, facial affect recognition, and CPI-training all proved essential elements to decrease crisis behaviors in NV/MV secondary special education students with ASD, whose target behaviors are physical aggression and SIB towards self and others in a self-contained classroom.

In addition, Kocak and Sari (2021) support this approach, explaining that knowledge of ASD behavior management helps maintain a learning environment centered on suitable interventions implemented by highly trained teachers. My goal for this qualitative single intrinsic case study was to simply expand upon and enhance the literature through the lens of BF Skinner's behaviorism theory by introducing additional non-verbal interventions for non-verbal students in which special education staff members utilized simultaneously to decrease students' physically aggressive and SIB.

Summary

The problem was that NV/MV secondary special education students with ASD are increasingly demonstrating physical aggression and SIB towards themselves or others in a self-

contained classroom. The purpose of this single intrinsic case study was to describe the experiences of using multiple forms of non-verbal interventions to decrease physical aggression and self-injurious behaviors for special education staff members in self-contained classrooms.

The 10 Participants' were a diversified group of individuals which included five male and five female special education staff members, ages ranged from 31-60, with five-35 years of experience working in special education with this population of students. The data collection methods used by the participants included online surveys, individual interviews, and focus group discussion session. The thematic findings emerged from the participants' responses of the data using the thematic analysis approach. I used the six-step process suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) to identify, analyze, organize, describe, and finalize the themes generated from the data. The results from the thematic analysis led to three recurring themes: (a) communication deficits between NV/MV students and staff, (b) relationship building is paramount when working with students, and (c) safety first.

The findings of this study indicated that using multiple-forms of non-verbal interventions simultaneously decreased crisis behaviors in NV/MV secondary special education students with ASD, whose target behaviors are physical aggression and SIB towards self and others in a self-contained classroom. Participants' 100% agreed "Teacher/Student Relationship, Facial Affect Recognition, and CPI" used every day in all aspects of the learning environment decreased crisis behaviors while promoting student and staff safety. While conducting research, it is vital to try and focus on what can be learned and understood in the case concerning the essential fundamental issues regarding the why, and its importance (Newhart & Patten, 2023). As special educators, it is important that we remember the why, and that all behavior is a form of communication, and even students without a voice, still have a right to be heard.

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Appendix A

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

February 26, 2024

Rodney Jackson
Shanna Baker

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY23-24-1158 PHYSICAL AGGRESSION AND SELF-INJURIOUS BEHAVIORS TOWARDS SELF OR OTHERS BY NON-VERBAL/MINIMALLY VERBAL SECONDARY SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS WITH AUTISM IN A SELF-CONTAINED CLASSROOM

Dear Rodney Jackson, Shanna Baker,

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

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

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

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

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

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at [REDACTED]

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B

Research Question

Central Research Question

What are special education staff members' experiences of using multiple forms of non-verbal interventions simultaneously to decrease physical aggression and self-injurious behaviors in self-contained classrooms?

Sub-Question One

Which non-verbal interventions do special education staff find most effective for non-verbal or minimally verbal students with ASD, physical aggression, and SIB in self-contained classrooms?

Sub-Question Two

How prepared do secondary special education staff members feel they are at utilizing non-verbal interventions in the self-contained classroom?

Appendix C

Consent form

Title of the Study: Physical Aggression and Self-Injurious Behaviors Towards Self or Others by Non-verbal/Minimally Verbal Secondary Special Education Students with Autism in a Self-Contained Classroom: A Qualitative Case Study.

Principal Investigator: Rodney K. Jackson, Sr. (Doctoral Candidate) at Liberty University.

Invitation to be part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. Participants must be current or former Birdville ISD (BISD) school staff who have worked with students; in grades 6th through 12th, identified and diagnosed with a disability autism spectrum disorder (ASD), in a secondary special education classroom, and all have behavior intervention plans (BIP) with target behaviors of physical aggression and self-injurious behaviors (SIB) towards self or others.

Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

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

What is the study about and why are we doing it?

The purpose of this case study will be to further understand, examine, and describe in greater detail educators' perceptions of physical aggression and self-injurious behaviors by secondary special education students with autism in a self-contained classroom.

What will participants be asked to do in this study?

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

1. Complete an online, 10-minute survey.

2. Participate in an audio-recorded interview, that should take no more than 1 hour to complete.
3. Participate in an audio-recorded focus group discussion session that should take no more than 1 hour to complete.

How could participants or others benefit from this study?

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

Benefits to society include a deeper understanding, awareness, and acceptance of the study topic.

The study will also provide detailed knowledge regarding the effectiveness of using multiple forms of non-verbal interventions and strategies simultaneously to decrease or prevent hurt or harm to participants or other persons now and in the future, who live with and provide care for these individuals in various settings.

What risks might participants experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks the participants 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.

1. Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms.
2. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
3. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other focus group members may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

4. Data collected from you may be used in future research. If data collected from you is reused, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed beforehand.
5. Data will be stored on a password-locked computer. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
6. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. The recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
7. Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
8. Interviews may be recorded and transcribed. If recorded, will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

Is study participation voluntary?

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

What should be done if a participant wishes to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address or phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and not 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 Rodney Jackson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at [REDACTED] and/or [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, [REDACTED] at [REDACTED].

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

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 [REDACTED]

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted ethically 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.

Consent form

You agree to participate in this study by signing this document. 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 researcher 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- and/or video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Name

Signature

Date

Appendix D

Survey Questions

1. Please explain the effectiveness of special educators who use multiple forms of non-verbal interventions simultaneously in a self-contained classroom environment? CRQ
2. Please explain how the teacher/student relationship can be effective in a self-contained classroom environment? SQ1
3. Please explain how facial affect recognition training can be effective in a self-contained classroom environment? SQ1
4. Please explain how crisis prevention intervention training can be effective in a self-contained classroom environment? SQ1
5. How frequently do you utilize various forms of non-verbal interventions in a self-contained classroom setting?
6. How easy is it for you to use these multiple forms of non-verbal interventions in a self-contained classroom environment? SQ2
7. How likely are you to recommend using these multiple forms of non-verbal interventions in a self-contained classroom environment to other colleagues? SQ2

Appendix E

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please describe your educational background and career through your current position.
CRQ
2. How do you feel personally and professionally about working with non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) whose target behaviors are physical aggression and SIB towards self or others? SQ1
3. How would you feel if a non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education student with ASD physically assaulted you in the classroom? SQ1
4. How would you assist someone who has been physically assaulted in the classroom by a non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education student with ASD? SQ1
5. How would you describe your challenges when working with non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with ASD? SQ2
6. How would you describe successful practices you use when working with non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with ASD? SQ1
7. How would professional development experiences help you prepare to work with non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with ASD? SQ1
8. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences with non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with ASD, that we haven't discussed? SQ1
9. How would you describe your challenges when working with students with non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with physical aggression in your classes? SQ2

10. How would you describe successful practices you use when working with non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with physical aggression in your classes? SQ1
11. How would professional development experiences help you prepare to work with non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with physical aggression? SQ1
12. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences with non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with physical aggression that we haven't discussed? SQ1
13. How would you describe your challenges when working with non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with self-injurious behaviors (SIB) in your classes? SQ2
14. How would you describe successful practices you use when working with non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with SIB in your classes? SQ1
15. How do professional development experiences help prepare you to work with non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with SIB? SQ1
16. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences with non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with SIB that we haven't discussed? SQ1
17. How would you describe your experiences of other special educators who use non-verbal interventions simultaneously i.e. relationship building, facial affect recognition, and crisis

intervention prevention with non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with ASD, physical aggression, and SIB? SQ2

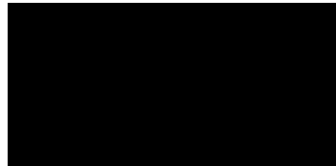
18. What else would you like to add to our discussion of other special educators' experiences who use non-verbal interventions simultaneously i.e. relationship building, facial affect recognition, and crisis intervention prevention with non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with ASD, physical aggression, and SIB students that we haven't discussed? SQ1

Appendix F

Focus Group Questions

1. What target behaviors are deemed most dangerous and an immediate safety risk for staff/peers in a self-contained classroom environment? CRQ
2. What type of staff member characteristics would be more effective in working with this population of students in a self-contained classroom environment? SQ1
3. CPI is a non-violent intervention method that is only used as a last resort to keep students safe. What are some pros and cons of implementing CPI? SQ2
4. What strategies have you found to be most effective in minimizing troublesome behavior in the classroom? SQ2
5. How can educators assist students in developing the required social and emotional skills? SQ2
6. In your perspective, what are some of the challenges of using positive behavior support approaches in a self-contained classroom? SQ1
7. Please detail a time when you had to intervene to avert a potentially dangerous situation. What were your strategies? SQ2
8. Which training or professional development would you want to pursue to better assist students in the classroom who demonstrate challenging behaviors? SQ1
9. Of all the topics we covered today, which do you feel were most relevant? CRQ
10. Is there anything that you feel is important that we missed when talking about these topics? CRQ

Appendix G



As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I will be conducting research as part of the requirements for a Ph.D. in Special Education degree. The title of my research project is “PHYSICAL AGGRESSION AND SELF-INJURIOUS BEHAVIORS TOWARDS SELF OR OTHERS BY NON-VERBAL/MINIMALLY VERBAL SECONDARY SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS WITH AUTISM IN A SELF-CONTAINED CLASSROOM: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY” and the purpose of my research is to describe in greater detail special education staff members’ perceptions of the effectiveness of using multiple forms of non-verbal interventions simultaneously to decrease physical aggression and self-injurious behaviors towards self or others by non-verbal/minimally verbal secondary special education students with autism in a self-contained classroom.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research regarding the Structured Environment to Enhance Communication (SEEC) Program and to contact and recruit members of your staff to invite them to participate in my research study i.e. secondary special education teachers, teachers’ assistants, behavior facilitators, coordinators, principals, and/or other auxiliary staff members with knowledge, and at least 1 year of experience and/or training with this unique population of students.

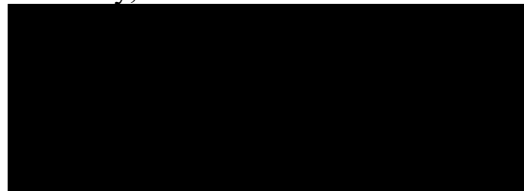
I will ask and invite participants who meet these criteria to contact me to complete an online survey, schedule individual interviews, and attend a focus group discussion. If approved potential participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please provide a signed statement on official letterhead indicating your approval or respond by email to

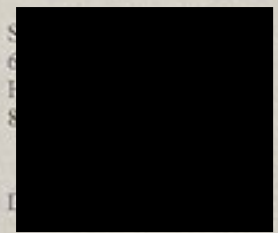
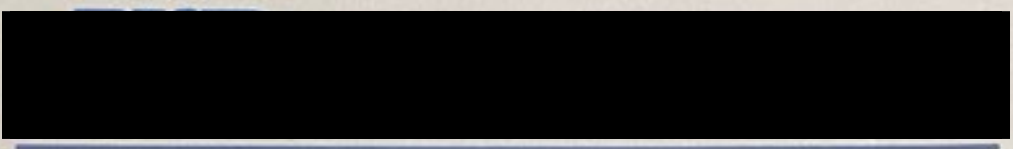


A permission letter document is attached for your

Sincerely,



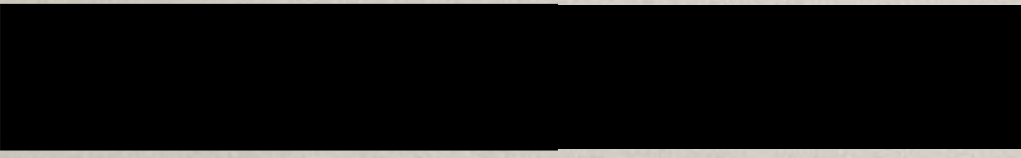
Appendix H



After careful review of your research proposal entitled "PHYSICAL AGGRESSION AND SELF-INJURIOUS BEHAVIORS TOWARDS SELF OR OTHERS BY NON-VERBAL/MINIMALLY VERBAL SECONDARY SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS WITH AUTISM IN A SELF-CONTAINED CLASSROOM: A COLLECTIVE QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY".

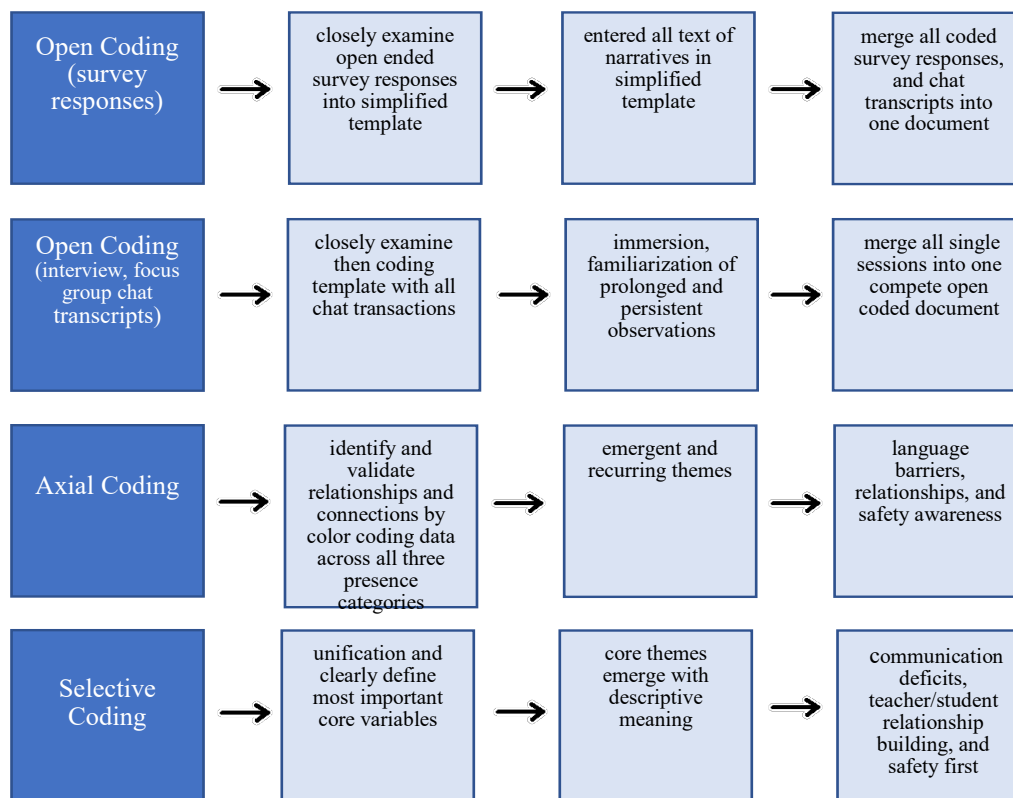
[Signature] I have decided to grant you permission to: Contact our staff and invite them to participate in your research study regarding Structured Environment to Enhance Communication (SEEC) Program.

___ I have decided not to grant you permission to: Contact our staff and invite them to participate in your study regarding the Structured Environment to Enhance Communication (SEEC) Program.



Appendix I
Qualitative Coding Procedures
(Thematic Analysis)

Table 6



The six-step process suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) to identify, analyze, organize, describe, and finalize the themes generated from the data.