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# Including Students with Emotional Disturbance: Teachers' Experiences

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# INCLUDING STUDENTS WITH EMOTIONAL DISTURBANCE: TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES

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**Abstract**

This phenomenological study explored three general educators' experiences of including students with Emotional Behavior Disorder (EBD) in the general education classroom. Given the challenges of including children with severe behaviors, the study aimed to understand what educational and behavioral practices teachers found useful as they strove to help students be successful. This study took place in a suburban school district with first-through-fourth grade elementary general education teachers who were perceived as being successful with students with EBD. This study used in-depth interviews to explore the teachers' lived experiences around their efforts to include students with EBD, using descriptions, quotes, and supporting detail to explore four emergent themes: a) practices teachers valued, b) aiming for success, c) administrative support, d) advice to fellow teachers. Recommendations for practice suggest the importance of school districts implementing Social Emotional Learning (SEL) practices in classrooms that include students with EBD. Teachers also spoke of the need for consistent and visible administrative support, increased collaboration between general and special educators, safe and open dialogue with other teachers, and increased training to ensure classroom safety. With increased attention on the challenges that face educators who include students with EBD, this study offers new insights on how to effectively include students with EBD in the general education classroom.

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## Table of Contents

Abstract ..... i

Acknowledgements ..... ii

List of Tables ..... viii

Chapter 1 ..... 1

Statement of the Problem ..... 2

Purpose and Significance ..... 4

Research Questions ..... 5

Definition of Key Terms ..... 5

Research Considerations ..... 7

Organization of the Study ..... 9

Concluding Thoughts ..... 9

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature ..... 10

Inclusion ..... 10

Least Restrictive Environment ..... 12

Challenges and Barriers ..... 15

- Lack of training ..... 15
- Teacher frustration ..... 17
- Lack of collaboration. ..... 17
- Lack of administrative support ..... 19

Teachers' Attitudes ..... 20

- Theory of Cognitive Dissonance. ..... 21
- Disability type and attitude ..... 22

Experience and attitudes. 22

Teachers' Experiences in the Inclusive Classroom 25

Responding to behavior. 26

Common behaviors. 26

Evidence-based strategies 28

Strategies teachers use. 31

Concluding Thoughts 33

Chapter 3: Methodology 35

Phenomenology 35

Setting 36

Participant Selection 37

Key informants. 37

Recruitment. 38

Data Sources and Gathering Procedures 40

Interviews. 40

Researcher's notes. 40

Analytic memos. 41

Data Analysis Procedures 41

In vivo coding 42

Emotion codes 42

Value coding 42

Pattern codes and concept maps 43

Member checks. ..... 43

Researcher's Reflections ..... 44

Bracketing. ..... 44

Researcher's background. ..... 45

How I came to this research. ..... 46

Trustworthiness and Credibility ..... 48

Research Ethics ..... 49

Summary ..... 49

Chapter 4: Findings ..... 51

Description of Participants ..... 51

General Demographic Background Information ..... 52

Isabella ..... 52

Jack ..... 55

Bobbi ..... 57

Themes ..... 58

Practices Teachers Valued ..... 58

Social emotional learning ..... 59

Classroom community ..... 64

Behavior intervention plans. ..... 67

Room clears. ..... 67

Aiming for Success ..... 70

Beliefs about inclusion ..... 71

Beliefs about students with EBD. ..... 72

Understanding students with EBD. ..... 75

The special education team ..... 76

Teachers' relationships. ..... 78

Experiences mattered. ..... 80

Administrative Support ..... 81

Training. ..... 82

Trust and advocacy from the principal. ..... 83

Support teachers needed. ..... 84

Advice for Fellow Teachers ..... 89

Summary of the Findings ..... 91

Chapter 5: Discussions and Conclusions ..... 93

Practices Teachers Valued ..... 93

Student Success ..... 95

Administrative Support ..... 97

Recommendations for Practice ..... 97

Implement social emotional learning practices. ..... 98

Provide consistent and visible administrative support. ..... 98

Promote safe and open dialogue with teachers. ..... 98

Increase collaboration between general and special educators ..... 99

Provide training to ensure classroom safety. ..... 99

Post-secondary education. ..... 100

Recommendations for Future Study ..... 100

Contributions to the Research ..... 101

Limitations ..... 102

Reflections and Insights ..... 102

References ..... 104

Appendix A ..... 116

Appendix B ..... 118

Appendix C ..... 120

Appendix E ..... 126

Appendix F ..... 128

Appendix G ..... 131

## List of Tables

Table Page

1 Demographic Information about the Teachers …… 53

# Chapter 1

*As I walked down the long hallway of one of several elementary schools I supervised as Director of SPED, I saw one of the second-grade teachers, Mrs. Blake headed toward me. As we neared each other, I noticed the slump of her shoulders; looking in her eyes told me something was very wrong. When I asked her what was going on, she sighed heavily and said, "I'm asking myself if I can stay in this profession!" At my surprised look, she said, "It's Austin (pseudonym) again. Even with all our ideas and interventions, she's still running around the room, yelling at her peers, and throwing crayons. Today, she got triggered by something someone said and ran out of the room and I had to call the office for support. It's so hard to teach these days! I cannot take care of her and the other 30 students in my classroom!" As I listened to her speak, I could feel the tension radiating off of her, and sensed the urgency of the situation. What could I say? How would I handle this situation, if I were in her shoes? I didn't know.*

Over the last five years, scenarios similar to this one have become a regular occurrence in my district's elementary schools. I often find myself wondering how teachers can effectively include students with challenging behaviors in the classroom, what kind of administrative support they need, and how best to distribute resources to address the demands of inclusion.

Since the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the amendment to IDEA in 2004, states are being compelled to include students with emotional behavior disorders (EBD) into the general education classroom at higher rates than ever before (Simpson & Mundschenk, 2012). An emotional behavior disorder is defined as a special education disability characterized by behavioral and emotional responses in education environments, that adversely affects a student's educational performance (Coutinho, Conroy, Forness, & Kavale, 2000).

Approximately 90% of all students with disabilities (SWD) in the United States are educated in the general education classroom for some part of the day, and 42% of students with Emotional Behavior Disorders (EBD) are included in the regular education classroom (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Teachers have identified that one of their greatest challenges in education is being able to "address the individual needs of diverse learners" (MetLife, 2013, p. 11), and students with EBD can pose some of the greatest challenges, given the complexity of their behavior needs.

**Statement of the Problem**

Students with EBD can pose difficulties for the teachers who serve them (Simpson & Mundschenk, 2012). These students often have higher rates of truancy, lower rates of academic performance, and exhibit behaviors that can be highly disruptive to the general education classroom (Vannest, Harrison, Temple-Harvey, Ramsey, & Parker, 2011). Some general education teachers are becoming progressively disappointed with classrooms that include students with EBD (Clunies-Ross, Little, & Kienhuis, 2008; Downing, 2007), and have reported feeling less prepared for these students than they feel prepared to teach students with other disabilities (Simpson & Mundschenk, 2012; Prochnow, 2006). According to work by Lambert, McCarty, O'Donnell & Wang, 2009), students who exhibit difficult behavior represent the most demanding part of teachers' responsibilities. These students typically struggle both academically and behaviorally in the general education classroom, particularly in situations where teachers are not equipped to handle their complex needs (Clunies-Ross, et al., 2008). This can negatively impact both students' and teachers' experiences (Allday et al., 2012).

School districts across the state of Oregon are experiencing higher rates of disruptive behavior problems in the general education classroom, and the push towards including students

with EBD is growing. Special schools that have addressed these problems in the past are diminishing, and school districts are left to determine how to meet students' behavioral needs with limited resources. Special education is often looked at as the only resource with knowledge and skills in including students with EBD, and general education teachers are expected to learn strategies that will help them meaningfully include these students. Students with EBD are less engaged in school and have more discipline referrals (Smith, Poling, & Worth, 2018). They fail to have positive social relationships with peers and adults (Polsgrove & Smith, 2004), and have higher drop-out rates and poor post-secondary outcomes (Salbornie, Cullinan, Osborne, & Brock, 2005; Zigmund, 2006). Amidst the high truancy and dropout rates, and lack of academic achievement for students with EBD, there are teachers who have experienced success with these students. Yet districts have done little to seek information from these teachers and learn from their experiences.

Teachers and administrators in Oregon want to know how to include students with EBD, what resources are needed, what strategies teachers need to learn, and how to support teachers when they include students with more intense behavioral needs. A recent report published by the Oregon Education Association (OEA, 2019), informed by interviews and surveys with teachers across Oregon, offers insight into teachers' perceptions of the behavior problems they experience in the classroom. In their self-titled report, "A Crisis of Disrupted Learning" (Oregon Education Association, 2019, p.1), the OEA reported that the issue of behavior problems in Oregon's elementary classrooms was "not limited in scope" and affected all districts (p. 5). Teachers described behaviors such as verbal abuse (cursing), physical abuse (hitting, kicking), and property destruction. The report outlined the stress teachers feel when including students with EBD, resulting in OEA issuing a call for action to effectively address this issue.

Listening to teachers' experiences, and hearing their voice is one step forward to helping to include students with EBD, particularly when the field seeks understanding from teachers who are perceived as successfully including students with EBD. By studying the rich experiences of these kinds of teachers, this research sought to address and give insight into what practices these teachers valued and found useful, the ways they reached success with students with EBD, and what administrative support they regarded as essential in their efforts to include these students. Subsequently, this research offers insight into how a few teachers make sense of these problems and how districts can take steps to support the inclusion of students with EBD.

**Purpose and Significance**

This qualitative phenomenological study was designed to examine the experiences of three elementary general education teachers who included students with EBD in their classrooms. I conducted face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with these teachers to hear about their perceptions and experiences in educating students with EBD, including their perceived challenges and successes.

Numerous quantitative studies of teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and needs associated with students with EBD in the general education classroom have been conducted (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000; Bender, Vail, & Scott, 1995; MacFarlane & Wilson, 2013). Amid the increasing trend of including students with EBD in the general education classroom, there has been little investigation into the lived experiences of teachers who teach students with EBD, and how those experiences affect their attitudes about these students, along with the strategies they have developed to be successful. Studies like this are important because students with EBD have complex needs and continued poor academic and behavioral outcomes in the general education classroom (Bradley, Doolittle & Bartlotta, 2008; Landrum, Katsiyannis & Archwamety, 2004).

Improving outcomes for these students might depend largely on understanding how general education teachers understand and experience the work of including EBD students. By seeking to provide the powerful and informative voice of general education teachers including students with EBD, this research offers the opportunity to advance teacher and student experience. It also holds the possibility of envisioning how to improve outcomes for these students in the inclusive classroom. Teacher voice may offer evidence to support future research for pinpointing specific instructional and behavioral interventions that work well.

**Research Questions**

1. What do elementary teachers who are committed to inclusion practices describe as their lived experiences in supporting students with disabilities, particularly students with EBD?
    a. What instructional practices do they value and find helpful for students with EBD?
    b. How do these educators view success for students with EBD? How do they aim for those successes?
    c. How do these teachers perceive administrative support for their inclusion efforts? What supports/resources do they say they need?

**Definition of Key Terms**

In any research study, it is important to define key terms. The following list identifies some of the significant terms related to this study.

Emotional Behavior Disorder (EBD): For this study, an emotional behavior disorder was defined as a special education disability characterized by behavioral and emotional responses in

education environments, that adversely affects a student's educational performance (Coutinho, Conroy, Forness, & Kavale, 2000).

General Education Teacher: A teacher who holds a license to teach general and content area subjects to students in a general education classroom.

Inclusion: Rafferty, Boettcher, & Griffin (2001) define inclusion as "the process of educating children with disabilities in the regular education of their neighborhood schools-the school they would attend if they did not have a disability- and provide the necessary services and supports" (p. 266). This could include specially designed instruction, related services, and accommodations and modifications.

Inclusive Classroom: The inclusive classroom is a place where, despite "ability, race, language and income, students are integral members of classrooms, feel a connection to their peers, have access to rigorous and meaningful general education curricula, and receive collaborative support to succeed" (Causton-Theoharis & Theoharis, 2008, p. 26). This definition is important because there are many interpretations and definitions of inclusion in the field of special education, which can be problematic. This definition is commonly used in the study of inclusion, and aimed at creating clarity for the reader.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): This is considered the foundational legislation in the field of special education. IDEA is the reauthorization of the Education for All Handicapped Children's Act passed in 1975. IDEA provides the legal basis and rules for decisions made in special education.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): The federal law which is included in the revision of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) enacted in 2004. Its

intent is to ensure children with disabilities are educated with non-disabled children "to the maximum extent appropriate" (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB): This law was initially known as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act that was signed into law in 2002 by President George W. Bush. NCLB's primary focus was on school accountability, which encompassed research-based instruction, and higher expectations of teacher credentials. It has been criticized for its focus on high-stakes testing and its lack of progress measured for disadvantaged students and students with disabilities (Price, 2010).

Individualized Education Plan (IEP): A written individualized plan, mandated by the law, that directs the implementation of specially designed instruction and related services. This plan is a means of providing children with disabilities equal access to education (McLeskey, Rosenberg, & Westling, 2018).

Segregated Classroom: Classrooms and/or schools that are separated from general education, where 100% of the students have disabilities. Segregated classrooms provide little or no opportunity for students with disabilities to participate academically and socially in general education classrooms or activities. This is a newly-occurring term in the field of special education used to describe such settings. Since the term "segregation" has been historically used to describe separate settings for students of color, the use of this term for students with disabilities has emerged as a way to accurately describe separate classrooms, and invoke action for social justice and educational funding.

**Research Considerations**

This study focused on a small sample of elementary teachers in grades 1-4, in one suburban school district. Therefore, the results from this study were not generalizable to all

elementary teachers in this district or in other districts. However, this was balanced by the opportunity to garner distinct and deep understandings from teachers that could prove transferrable to other classrooms (Guba, 1981).

Because this study relied on participant interviews, there was the possibility for social desirability, or the tendency of participants to answer in ways that make them look good to others (Furr, 2010). Participants knew that my background and professional role was in special education, and this may have influenced how they responded. They may have also responded in ways that they believed aligned with societal norms. I worked to ameliorate this by recruiting participants who did not have a previous relationship with me, nor were they teachers I supervised as part of my job. While the relationship between researcher and participants cannot be reciprocal, building rapport with the participants was a key strategy I used to try and ensure that participants felt safe being truthful with me.

Although I only sampled first- through fourth-grade elementary teachers, the results of this study can still be applicable to teachers in other grade levels. I intentionally selected these grade levels because they represented the largest grade span and shared common developmental characteristics of Oregon elementary schools. Special education identification of students with EBD is more likely to occur after kindergarten because of the developmental growth of students and interventions that typically take place over the course of a kindergarten year. I elected to exclude kindergarten teachers from this study because of the limited opportunities they might have had to knowingly educate a student with EBD. I also decided to exclude fifth- and sixth-grade teachers because of the differences in developmental characteristics of these students from first through fourth grades (Eccles, 1999). Finally, interviewing first- through fourth-grade teachers, gave me a greater possibility of finding teachers who had the experience of including a

student with EBD in their classroom, as well as them having experienced longer periods of time to implement strategies.

**Organization of the Study**

This study is organized into five chapters, beginning with an introduction to the problem of practice, research questions, and the purpose and significance of the proposed research in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 contains a review of related literature and research associated with the problem of practice, along with background information on key concepts related to teachers' experiences of educating students with EBD. The methodological framework and procedures used to collect data for the study are presented in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 contains the findings and results of the study, and Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the results, implications, and recommendations for the research.

**Concluding Thoughts**

Students with EBD pose a significant challenge to general educators, even as the number of these students included in the general classroom continues to increase (Darrow, 2016). Although effective practices have been identified in the literature, the on-the-ground experiences teachers have with these students have only been explored on a limited basis. General educators who have been successful with students with EBD are in a unique position to offer insights and information about their experiences and the meanings those experiences hold. By describing their experiences, general educators who include these students with EBD have the potential to identify successful practices that may prove useful.

# Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

As context for this study, it is important to start with what inclusion is and the foundational ideas of what constitutes a Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). Following this is an exploration of what elementary general education teachers perceive as challenges and barriers when working with students with Emotional Behavioral Disorders (EBD). The final section of this chapter investigates teachers' experiences of including students with EBD in the classroom, given the range of behaviors these students exhibit. Additionally, some known practices and interventions for children with EBD are discussed.

## Inclusion

The inclusion of students with EBD in the general education classroom is extremely challenging, and aside from intellectual disabilities, EBD is still seen as one of the most difficult categories of students to include (MacMillan, Gresham, & Forness, 1996). Every school district conceptualizes inclusion differently, which has resulted in a continuum ranging from restrictive placements to full inclusion in the classroom (Causton & Theoharis, 2014). For this study, inclusion is defined as "the process of educating children with disabilities in the regular education of their neighborhood schools, the school they would attend if they did not have a disability, and provide the necessary services and supports" (Rafferty, Boettcher, & Griffin, 2001, p. 266).

Inclusion of SWD has its roots in a landmark judicial decision, Pennsylvania v. Pennsylvania Association of Retarded Citizens (Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 1971). This decision required that Pennsylvania students with mental retardation receive a free and appropriate public education. The preceding case of Mills v. Board of Education of District of Columbia, mandated that all students with disabilities be included in general education settings (Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia, 1972). In 1975, Public Law 94-142 was passed, also known as the Education for all Handicapped Children's Act (Public Law 94-142, 1975). It ensured students with disabilities would receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE).

The time period of the 1960's and 1970's was one of educational reform for SWD, and was characterized by a change in mindsets towards special education and SWD (Winzer, 2009). Concepts and practices such as mainstreaming and integration became predominant themes in special education. Still, few SWD were being included in the general education classroom, leading to critical questions about social justice and civil rights for SWD. During the 1980's, general education reform was taking place with A Nation at Risk report (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), and The Regular Education Initiative (REI) proposed by the assistant secretary for the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services of the Department of Education (Will, 1986). This reform helped propel increased participation of SWD in the general education classroom. Moreover, educators in support of inclusive schooling "strived to rid education of stubborn, long-standing inequalities through a revisualization of the organizational structures of schools" (Winzer, 2009, p. 206).

Despite these landmark cases, and the advocacy efforts of parents of SWD to have their children be included in the general education classroom, the concept of inclusion has become more of an ideological debate (Causton & Theoharis, 2014). There is still widespread disagreement about what inclusion means and whether or not it is effective. Even with some research that demonstrates the effectiveness and positive aspects of inclusion of students with EBD (Causton-Theoharis, Theoharis, Bull, Cosier, & Demph-Aldrich, 2011), many districts continue to place these students in restrictive settings, with limited or no access to the general education classroom (Ainscow, 2005).

**Least Restrictive Environment**

Although the definition of inclusion is not outlined in the law, the practice of inclusion is guided by regulations in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) under the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) provision of this law (Causton & Theoharis, 2014). According to IDEA (2004), the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) requires that students with disabilities (SWD) be educated with their non-disabled peers as much as possible. As one of the foundations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), LRE is the legal principle on which inclusion is based.

The vague definition of LRE and variability in its practice has created confusion and debate amongst educators about how LRE practices are implemented in schools (McGovern, 2000). This can lead to inconsistent and unclear procedures for IEP teams when determining placement decisions in the LRE. Without a clear definition from the courts, many districts are left to define what LRE means (McGovern, 2000), and this has created two factions with distinct philosophies about the meaning of LRE, along with a legal basis for both (Marx et al., 2014).

One faction believes that LRE means full inclusion in the regular education classroom, and another faction believes LRE should be defined by where a student's needs can best be met (Marx et al., 2014). Although the national numbers show increases in LRE placements for SWD, the disruptive behaviors of students with EBD pose a distinctive challenge to inclusive efforts, because they can interrupt academic progress and hinder social performance for all students (Jull, 2008). Additionally, students with EBD find it challenging to develop and maintain relationships with peers and adults, make positive social progress, follow school rules, and make academic gains (Otten & Tuttle, 2011).

Interestingly, students with EBD are often left out of discussions of how to implement full inclusion (Simpson & Mundschenk, 2012). This may be due to the significant number of social, academic, and intervention supports needed by these students (Simpson & Mundschenk, 2012), as well as the difficulty teachers have managing them in the classroom (Kauffman & Hallahan, 2018). Teachers fear that students with EBD will negatively impact other students, create school safety concerns, and disrupt the classroom environment (Heflin & Bullock, 1999).

The ways principals and teachers understand, or do not understand LRE, can strongly influence the type of special education placement policies in a school. In a qualitative study of five elementary schools, principals had a difficult time determining what LRE meant and believed LRE should be based on a student's ability to "earn" their way into the general education classroom (O'Laughlin & Lindle, 2015). This suggests administrators have a perceived need for students to demonstrate improved behavior as a way of earning LRE privileges. But this idea, that students with EBD have to earn their way into a general education classroom, is contradictory to what LRE requires. It also suggests that there may be a higher standard for these students than for general education students whose participation is generally unquestioned.

Praisner (2003) found that as principals had more positive experiences with SWD, they chose to place students in the LRE, indicating that inclusion practices can be subjective to experience. What is intended to provide SWD access to the general education in the LRE, can sometimes become an exercise in policy compliance with LRE, informed by the underlying values and beliefs of the people making decisions. Divergent beliefs about the meaning of LRE can make placement decisions extremely challenging, especially for students with EBD. Because these students are often more problematic to educate and manage in the general education classroom, due their complex behavioral and academic needs, LRE is a more obscure concept for teachers of these students.

While IDEA and the courts have not articulated LRE to be synonymous with inclusion into the regular education classroom, a broader trend towards inclusion as the LRE for SWD is a reality (Bartlett & Remarks, 2015; Sumbera, Pazey, & Lashley, 2014). This trend has been driven in part by increased accountability for student achievement, starting with the No Child

Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001), which required access to the general education curriculum and participation in high-stakes testing for SWD (McLeskey, Landers, Williamson, & Hoppey, 2012). With the reauthorization of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015), the focus on results and accountability for SWD is ever-present (Darrow, 2016), and an upward trend of inclusion is likely to continue.

As educators understand the greater emphasis that IDEA (2004) puts on educating students with EBD in the general education classroom, separate and more restrictive placements will likely be unjustified. Still, these students are often placed in separate schools, only behind students with deaf-blindness, a very low incidence disability (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). As students with EBD are included in the general education classroom to a greater extent, the educational system will demand an elevated depth of knowledge and understanding of LRE and how placement decisions are made.

**Challenges and Barriers**

Inclusion of SWD into the general education classroom presents many challenges for general education teachers, and research has revealed consistent themes on this issue: teachers feel they lack a) the knowledge and training to meet the needs of SWD (Gehrke, Cocchiarella, Harris, & Puckett, 2014), b) necessary collaboration with more knowledgeable others (Fuchs, 2010; McKleskey, Waldron & Redd, 2014), and c) administrative support (Conderman, Johnston, & Rodriguez, 2009; Fuchs, 2010; Gherke et al., 2014).

**Lack of training.** Quality teaching requires a specific set of knowledge, skills, and training that teachers receive during their pre-service programs and during their career as in-service teachers. Many pre-service teaching programs offer little to no practical training beyond theory in the area of special education, disability studies, and inclusion (Cochhiarella & Gehrke,

2013; Conderman & Johnston-Rodriguez, 2009; Fuchs, 2010), leaving many general education teachers unprepared to understand, much less meet, the individual needs of SWD included in the classroom.

Lack of training for specific disability types also presents a challenge for general education teachers who have SWD included in the general education classroom, creating misperceptions and anxiety about SWD (Lindsay, Proulx, Thompson, & Scott, 2013). Opportunities for high-quality job-embedded professional development are a key factor in the development of a successful inclusive classroom, yet teachers consistently point out the lack of these opportunities (McKleskey et al., 2014). For example, Conderman & Johnston-Rodriguez (2009) found that general education teachers felt less prepared than special education teachers to help assist SWD to access general education. Feeling ill-equipped to implement inclusion because of lack of training and continuing education makes it challenging for teachers to adapt curriculum and provide effective instructional interventions for students with EBD. Ultimately, this can hinder general education teachers' ability to successfully include these students in the general education classroom. The challenges teachers report is an important consideration for including students with EBD because they are perceived by educators to be more challenging and the cause of a decrease of learning in the classroom for all students (Westling, 2017).

**Teacher frustration.** Teachers have felt elevated levels of frustration when educating students with EBD in the general education classroom, and have cited an absence of resources and feelings of ineffectiveness (Cochran, Gibbons, Spurgeon, & Cochran, 2011). Other studies of teachers' perceptions on this topic have found that teachers feel themselves to be ineffective and students' behavior has caused greater stress (Abidin & Robinson, 2002; MacDonald & Speece, 2001). In Westling's (2010) study of 70 general and special educators, teachers reported that students with EBD required a significant amount of their time in the classroom, impacted the learning of other students, and intensified the amount of stress they felt. Almost half of the general educators agreed that "challenging behavior makes them think about quitting" (p. 56). At a time when the teaching profession is struggling to find qualified teachers (Yost, 2006), increased levels of stress for general educators who teach students with EBD poses a concern for successful inclusion efforts.

**Lack of collaboration.** According to Kusuma-Powell & Powell (2000), "collaboration takes place when members of an inclusive learning community work together as equals to assist students to succeed in the classroom" (para. 7). Collaboration is becoming a more common expectation as SWD are included more often in the general education classroom (Conderman & Johnston-Rodriguez, 2009). Collaboration is seen as one of the integral parts of an effective inclusive classroom (Lipsky & Gartner, 1997), yet its implementation continues to be a challenge identified by general education teachers (Dymond, Renzalglia, & Chun, 2008; Lindsay et al., 2013; M. Smith & K. Smith, 2000). Once seen as strictly a way to make decisions around special education identification and IEP development, collaboration has now extended into the general education classroom with a focus on instructional strategies and support for SWD (Arseneau, 2012).

In a four-year study done with eight school districts in California where SWD were demonstrating high academic performance, Huberman, Navo, and Parish (2012) identified a key factor to the schools' success was ongoing collaboration between general education and special education teachers. Their work revealed how a collaborative approach gives general educators the support they need to understand the specific strategies to use with SWD, as well as the ability to develop a shared understanding of expected outcomes and goals of inclusion. Collaboration also serves to support the generalization of skills SWD learn in more restrictive settings, helping them make a smoother transition to the general education classroom (Idol, 2006).

Because of its very nature, collaboration removes barriers of isolation for teachers, and serves to open up dialogue between general and special educators. Collaboration is key for a successful inclusive environment, as it promotes essential dialogue and problem solving between general and special educators, gives voice to teachers, and fosters innovation (Skrtic, Sailor, & Gee, 1996). However, beginning teachers have reported that a challenge to collaboration was differences in their beliefs of inclusion and difficulty interacting with others (Conderman & Johnston-Rodriguez, 2009). The struggles teachers have with collaboration, their perception of the need for it, as well as the many positive aspects of collaboration for the inclusion of SWD and students with EBD, emphasizes the need for districts to find clearer, more structured opportunities for collaboration

**Lack of administrative support.** Overcoming challenges to inclusion is only possible with administrative support, yet teachers have identified lack of administrative support as one of their biggest challenges when trying to successfully include SWD (Dymond et al., 2008; Fuchs, 2010; M. Smith & K. Smith, 2000). Some general education teachers perceive their administrators as uneducated about SWD (Dymond et al., 2008), nonetheless, teachers believe administrative support is essential for inclusion of SWD (M. Smith & K. Smith, 2000).

In a mixed methods study of 47 elementary general education teachers' perceptions of successful inclusion, interviews with teachers uncovered significant differences between teachers' beliefs about administrative support (M. Smith & K. Smith, 2000). Some teachers indicated they did not feel administrative support was necessary for successful inclusion and others felt it was helpful. Interviews revealed that teachers gave varied reports of the support they received from their administrators, even within the same building. Some teachers reported frequent interaction and support, while others reported infrequent interaction. Inconsistent administrative support can be challenging when teachers are expected to support and implement inclusion. This might suggest that consistent administrative support is essential for inclusion of SWD even if all teachers do not feel it is necessary. Because building administrators organize schedules and teachers' time, and provide curricular and personnel resources, they are the key to overcoming many of the barriers that teachers identify. The time that administrators give teachers can support collaboration and training needs (M. Smith & K. Smith, 2000), as well as foster a positive, inclusive culture in the school.

In a survey of 56 middle school teachers implementing inclusion, Santoli, Sachs, & Romey (2008) found that over 90% of teachers felt they did not feel supported by their principal with the amount of time they needed for planning, collaboration, and training. If teachers do not feel they have the time to meet the needs of SWD, their attitudes towards inclusion may be contrary to implementing a positive inclusive classroom (Santoli et al., 2008), emphasizing the need for positive administrative support.

Inclusion of students with EBD, the legal principles on which inclusion is founded, and the challenges teachers face, create a complex landscape for teachers and administrators to navigate. As the upward trend of inclusion of SWD into the general education classroom continues, it is important to understand how these complexities impact the inclusion of students with EBD. The challenges teachers face with these students, their attitudes towards inclusion of students with EBD, and the experiences they have, shed light on ways forward for improving outcomes in the general education classroom.

**Teachers' Attitudes**

General education teachers' attitudes are the crux of successful inclusion of students with EBD in the general education classroom. The attitudes of teachers towards inclusion of SWD have been investigated broadly as a way of observing the evolution of inclusive education and viewed as one way to predict effective instructional outcomes. Hogg and Vaughn (2010) defined attitude as "a general feeling or evaluation, positive or negative, about some person, object or issue" (p. 94). Braunsteiner and Mariano-Lapidus (2014) posit that teachers' positive attitudes are necessary for inclusion to successfully advance.

When evaluating teachers' attitudes, it is essential to understand that attitudes are connected to the behavior of teachers towards inclusion of SWD and students with EBD. Therefore, an attitude can control positive or negative outcomes of inclusion (Soodack et al.,1998).

**Theory of Cognitive Dissonance.** The Theory of Cognitive Dissonance (Festinger, 1962) can contribute to an understanding of teachers' attitudes towards inclusion. Cognitive dissonance is when a person has an attitude that is inconsistent with their behavior, resulting in discomfort (Festinger, 1962). People are compelled to have consistency between their inner beliefs and behavior, and when they have an awareness of an inconsistency in their beliefs and behavior, this causes dissonance (Festinger, 1962). Festinger equated inconsistency with dissonance and consistency with consonance, and claimed people struggled for consistency within themselves. Dissonance develops when inconsistent information interferes with one's beliefs and leads to the development of misperceptions and misinterpretations (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 1999). Thus, teachers who may understand inclusion of SWD and students with EBD to be required by law, and believe it is the right thing to do, might also hold conflicting beliefs towards inclusion (Wiest & Kriel, 1995).

Some teachers have fixed ideas about how SWD will perform academically and behaviorally in classrooms and these fixed ideas can generate negative feelings and attitudes in teachers (Cartlege & Kourea, 2008). Dissonance in teachers may occur when teachers' negative attitudes towards inclusion conflict with the principles associated with inclusion, such as high expectations for all learners, differentiation, reducing barriers in the classrooms, and supporting learning differences. It is the teachers' awareness of their conflicting belief with practice that may create dissonance. Change is fueled by discomfort, and understanding teachers' attitudes

towards inclusion of students with EBD and the dissonance they may experience, can help promote change towards equitable inclusion.

**Disability type and attitude.** Attitudes teachers hold about inclusion vary based on their perceived demands of students with SWD and students with EBD (Soodack et al., 1998), and many times, teachers view SWD who require fewer demands to be a better fit for inclusion (Praisner, 2003; Soodack et al., 1998). Idol's (2006) research with 79 classroom teachers, 24 special educators, and 13 support staff across four elementary schools, demonstrated that teachers had fewer positive attitudes towards inclusion when a student with disruptive behavior was present in their classroom. In a qualitative study of 12 general education teachers, Cook et al. (2007) discovered that teachers who had students with academic based disabilities, such as Specific Learning Disability, felt more positively about their students than those teachers who had students with both academic and behavior issues. This supports Brophy and McCaslin's (1992) earlier quantitative study of 98 teachers, which uncovered that severely challenging student behavior elicited teachers' negative attitudes towards students with EBD. These findings suggest these students presenting challenging behavior might prompt teachers' negative attitudes towards inclusion of students with EBD and further inhibit their willingness to include them in their classrooms.

**Experience and attitudes.** Teachers' experiences with teaching SWD varies based on number of years teaching and their personal experiences with SWD (Clough & Lindsay, 1991). Teachers' attitudes have an impact on the type of instructional techniques they use in the classroom, which is significant given the field's understanding that teachers' attitudes toward inclusion influence their actions (Kamens, Loprete, & Slostad, 2000). The more experience teachers have with teaching SWD, the more positive their attitudes about inclusion (Janney,

Snell, Beers, & Raynes, 1995), and teachers with positive attitudes implement inclusive practices on a more regular basis (Bender, Vail, & Scott, 1995). In a study of teachers' attitudes toward inclusion, Leatherman and Niemeyer (2005) found that teachers who had more direct experience with inclusion of SWD, and the positive experiences they described, indicated potential for future positive attitudes towards inclusion.

One mixed methods study asked 550 teachers to rank their attitudes toward particular student characteristics, and followed up with interviews to better understand the complex nature of teachers' attitudes (Thomas, 1985). One interesting finding was that the special education teachers' attitudes significantly shaped the general education teachers' attitudes. When teachers could interact with positively-oriented special education teachers, they themselves were more positive. Similarly, if the special education teacher had negative attitudes toward children with moderate intellectual disabilities, teachers also indicated negative attitudes. This is intriguing because it may suggest that teachers with more experience with SWD, like special education teachers, can positively influence the attitudes of general education teachers who have less experience.

Teachers' attitudes towards inclusion seem to change for students with more significant disabilities, including students with EBD. In a three-year project designed to improve inclusion of students with EBD, 32% of teachers stated that direct experiences with students with EBD improved their attitudes towards inclusion of these students (Shapiro, Miller, Sawka, Gardill, & Handler, 1999). However, in a more recent study, McFarlane and Woolfson (2013) learned that teachers who had more experience with students with EBD had more negative feelings towards inclusion, implying that the more exposure to challenging behavior teachers have, the greater the impact on their attitudes towards students with EBD. In Idol's (2006) program review of

elementary schools that had transitioned from partial inclusion (less than a full day in the general education classroom) of SWD to full inclusion (all day in the general education classroom) over one year, there was little change in teachers' attitudes towards inclusion. As teachers gained more practice with inclusion, their attitudes were only slightly more positive towards inclusion of SWD.

The differences in results of these studies suggest the complex nature of discerning which student characteristics influence teachers' attitudes, and whether or not their attitudes will be positive or negative. These differences could also be an indication that general education teachers do not fully understand the nature of EBD, or that they may lack the skills to work with challenging behaviors.

When Avramidis et al. (2000) surveyed teachers' attitudes towards inclusion of SWD, teachers pointed to the need for extra training to successfully implement inclusion. In a study of elementary school general education teachers' attitudes towards inclusion, teachers agreed that inclusion was the best placement option for SWD, yet their feelings of being unprepared to meet the needs of SWD made them reject the idea of inclusion (Fuchs, 2010). This implies that even though teachers might believe that inclusion is the best for SWD, they may not feel adequately prepared and effective in order to support its implementation. This is of particular importance to teachers of students with EBD, because these students present challenging situations in the classroom and often need frequent modifications to the learning environment (Yell et al., 2013).

Teachers' attitudes about inclusion of SWD and students with EBD can shape their feelings about inclusion and their willingness to implement it. They can also help identify areas of need for successful practices. Furthermore, teachers' attitudes may determine how they

experience working with these students, and an understanding of those experiences is necessary to influence positive outcomes for students.

**Teachers' Experiences in the Inclusive Classroom**

Individuals' experiences are a key characteristic of how one makes sense of one's work and learns how to do that work in better ways. When teachers experience what Dewey (1938) calls the "immediate aspect" of how an experience can be favorable or disagreeable, teachers respond accordingly. Because general education teachers have so little preparation for supporting students with EBD ( Conderman, Johnston, & Rodriguez, 2009), they often have disagreeable experiences that lead them to be less understanding, patient, or supportive (Cameron, 2014). They might also make conclusions about their students that are incorrect. However, whether they are positive or negative, teachers' experiences can also lead to improvement of their understanding of SWD and knowledge of instructional practices (Allison, 2012). Listening to and understanding the positive and negative experiences of general education teachers who include students with EBD in the classroom can help inform ways to support these teachers' growth and strengthen their practices to improve student outcomes.

While there is considerable research on general educations teachers' experience with inclusion of SWD, the body of research of general education teachers' experiences with students with EBD is relatively small. Still, high percentages of general education teachers report having students with challenging behavior in the classroom (Beam & Mueller, 2017; Gable, Tonelson, Sheth, Wilson, & Park, 2012), and in many of the studies of teachers' experiences with SWD, teachers identify students with EBD as the most challenging students to include (Cameron, 2014; Mundschenk & Simpson, 2012).

**Responding to behavior.** In a mixed methods study of 17 general education teachers' interactions with students in inclusive classrooms, teachers revealed that most of their interactions with SWD in the classroom were for non-academic tasks such as prompting and redirecting, and primarily in response to challenging behavior (Cameron, 2014). Additionally, some teachers reported that the attention devoted to behavior of SWD was greater than that devoted to students without disabilities. Observations conducted in the classroom showed that 42% of all one-to-one teacher-student interactions were with students with significant disabilities, including EBD (Cameron, 2014). This finding is consistent with Lohrmann and Bambaras' (2006) study where teachers reported that students with EBD took a great deal of time away from their ability to work with other students. This suggests that teachers devote a great deal of classroom time responding to non-academic behavior and providing one-to-one attention to students with EBD.

In Cameron's (2014) study, teachers described how SWD and students with EBD required more patience than other students. However, at the same time teachers reported they would respond to students with EBD in the same way as with students without disabilities. This suggests the challenge some teachers may feel as they try to treat students with EBD equally while at the same providing them with necessary supports that many students without EBD do not require (Cameron, 2014).

**Common behaviors.** While behavior problems can be categorized very generally, it is important to understand the common behaviors that teachers experience with students with EBD in the general education classroom. Understanding the behaviors that general education teachers experience in the classroom, ranging from less intense to more intense, can help inform specific classroom practices, training, and support.

In a qualitative study of 14 general education first-through sixth-grade teachers who included students with EBD, teachers described behaviors such as crying, refusal to do schoolwork, throwing objects, aggression towards other students, screaming, hitting, spitting, and biting. The most common behaviors reported were various types of refusal (Lohrmann & Bambara, 2006). Some of these teachers expressed fear for their own safety and for other students, given the severity of these disruptive behaviors. They also reported a general feeling of frustration (Lohrmann & Bambara, 2006).

In another qualitative study utilizing in-depth interviews of 20 general education kindergarten and first-grade teachers across five schools, teachers described behaviors of students with EBD in the classroom as "disrespectful, name-calling, temper tantrums, and hitting" (Dutton-Tillery, Varjas, Myers, & Smith-Collins, 2010, p. 92). Although some of the behaviors might have been more aggressive, the most frequent behavior described by these teachers was non-compliance with rules (Dutton-Tillery et al., 2010).

In a quantitative study of 132 teachers surveyed to indicate the most frequent classroom behaviors of students with EBD, 23% of teachers reported internalizing behaviors (depression, anxiety, withdrawal), 20% of teachers reported antisocial behavior (intentional and overt, such as defiance), and 15% reported aggressive behaviors (Conley, Marchant, & Caldarella, 2007). One problem with the results of this study was the categorization of different behaviors and the missed opportunity to get more concrete descriptions of behavior.

The ways teachers describe and categorize behaviors is important to consider because the more specific the description, the easier it is to identify what intervention or practice to apply. These studies give valuable insight into the range and complexity of behaviors that teachers of these students experience on a daily basis.

**Evidence-based strategies.** Legislation such as NCLB (2002) and ESSA (2015) have placed a strong emphasis on research and evidenced-based practices in schools, and a number of strategies have been identified as successful for students with EBD (Cook, Landrum, Tankersley, & Kauffman, 2003). Cook et al. (2003) argued that the strategies and evidenced-based practices found to be successful with these students should be shared not only with special education teachers but with general education teachers. It is also important that strategies teachers use be carefully and thoughtfully implemented in order for teachers to see them work and successfully repeat them (Sindelar & Brownell, 2001).

General education teachers have expressed a paucity of skills for working with students with EBD (Heflin & Bullock, 1999; Lopes, 2004), and although instructional strategies used with these students can be successful for all other students in the classroom (Boardman, Arguelles, & Vaughn, 2005), many effective strategies go past what is practical for the general education classroom (Niesyn, 2009). Therefore, there is a necessity for efficient and lasting interventions that are simple for general education teachers to implement (Perkins & McLaughlin, 2015).

The ability to choose an intervention for behavior depends on dynamics such as the time it will take, the seriousness of the behavior, and even teachers' beliefs and attitudes about the intervention, itself (Alderman & Nix, 1997). Many effective instructional strategies that are reasonable for general education teachers to implement in the classroom are teacher praise, scaffolding independent work, increasing opportunities for correct responses, peer tutoring opportunities, student choice, and direct instruction (Niesyn, 2009). Direct instruction of social skills, through the use of social emotional learning (SEL) programs has yielded positive student outcomes. In a metanalysis of 213 SEL programs in schools, with over 200,000 students, participants who received SEL instruction showed considerable improvement in social and

emotional skills, attitudes, behavior, and academic performance (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). Behavior management strategies such as setting classroom rules and procedures, teacher directives, and student self-management are also effective ways to work with all students (Niesyn, 2009).

The use of Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) is considered an effective, evidenced-based system for providing behavioral support to students with EBD and can be used for both prevention and intervention with all students (Sprague, 2006; Sugai & Horner, 2006). It is one of the most highly practiced school wide systems for behavior, and well researched.

The foundation of PBIS is Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), which is a methodology based on looking at behavior in a cycle of antecedents (what happens before behavior), behaviors, and consequences, and requires that teachers manage and limit antecedents and consequences to make learning possible (Yell et al., 2013). With a continuum of interventions, PBIS can be easily implemented by classroom teachers and integrated into the general education classroom (Sprague, 2006). With its basis in ABA, PBIS focuses on the context in which behaviors manifest, and stresses the "application of evidence-based behavioral technologies in the larger context of the classroom, school, and district" (Sugai & Horner, 2006, p. 246).

PBIS includes several strategies for classroom management and is characterized by a positive classroom environment, effective teaching strategies, positive reinforcement, and frequent teacher feedback (Horner & Sugai, 2015). The classroom teacher has been identified as the fundamental person who implements behavioral interventions within this model (Reddy, Fabiano, Dudek, & Hsu, 2013), and when PBIS is implemented properly, challenging behavior

can be mitigated or even improved, for all students, including students with EBD (Westling et al., 2014; Westling, 2015).

One limitation of PBIS is its inability to extend to more intense individualized interventions that many of students with EBD require (Kern, Hilt-Panahon, & Sokol, 2009). While PBIS provides a system to implement effective evidenced-based strategies such as rule setting, developing classroom procedures, positive reinforcement, and proactive classroom management, this preventative model may not be enough to successfully care for students with EBD, when their behavior is recurrent, extreme, and continual over a long period of time (Brigham & Kauffman, 1998).

Yell et al. (2013) suggest that any interventions for students with EBD must be research or evidence-based, connected to assessment data, and implemented with fidelity. Given this assumption, methods such as token economy, level systems, behavioral intervention plans, group contingencies, and in some cases, response-cost can be used to more effectively intervene with students with EBD (Yell et al., 2013). These types of interventions differ from PBIS because they are more individualized for specific student behaviors versus whole-group.

McLeskey, Rosenberg, and Westling (2018) suggest teachers use several effective strategies to meet the needs of students with EBD in the inclusive classroom, (a) develop and maintain rules and procedures; (b) surface management techniques; (c) provide consistent consequences; (d) defuse confrontation and respond to dangerous behavior; (e) check-in and out systems; (f) functional behavior assessment (FBA); (g) behavior intervention plans; (h) direct social skills instruction; (i) culturally responsive classroom management; and (j) culturally responsive approaches. A more recent approach to intervening with students who students with EBD, is the wraparound model of care (McLeskey et al., 2018), which includes organized and

integrated work by community professionals, parents and educators, to assist in highly individualized plans of care for students.

**Strategies teachers use.** It is important to explore the strategies general education teachers employ to address challenging behavior in the classroom (Evans, Weiss, & Cullinan, 2012) so that systemic and administrative support can be given (Cook et al., 2003). Because behavioral strategies and interventions are central to effective educational outcomes for students with EBD, it is crucial to determine what teachers use in the classroom, the research and evidence behind the strategies and interventions, and which strategies teachers find useful (Perkins & McLaughlin, 2015).

Teachers encounter a range of challenging behaviors by students with EBD, and may be given a number of ideas and suggestions on how to handle misbehavior (Yell et al, 2013). In a qualitative study of 20 general education teachers' perceptions of behavior of all students in the classroom and the behavior management strategies they used, Dutton-Tillery et al. (2010) found that teachers reported the use of behavioral methods for individual students such as positive praise, a strategy that has been associated with increased on-task behavior (Apter, Arnold, & Stinson, 2010). The teachers used less whole group or schoolwide methods, such as setting school and classroom rules and expectations. Teachers frequently used verbal reprimands to interrupt a student's behavior, one of the most frequently used strategies (Abramowitz, O'Leary, & Rosen, 1987). Even when teachers were not familiar with PBIS, they identified their use of individualized and evidence-based methods such as response-cost and token economy (Doll, McLaughlin, & Barretto, 2013; Dutton-Tillery et al., 2010). Participants also expressed their use of what they considered to be reactive approaches such as increased physical proximity towards

students, isolating students, or referring a student to the office for discipline (Bean & Gillet, 2012).

In Westling's (2010) survey of 70 teachers that included 32 general education teachers' use of behavioral strategies in the classrooms, very few teachers reported the use of any of the strategies of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) or PBIS. The most frequent strategies used often or very often were reinforcement of preferred behaviors, modification of curriculum, modification of teaching methods, and adaptations to the classroom setting. In a qualitative study of 13 general elementary education teachers' experiences with students with behavioral problems, teachers reported the use of proactive approaches to behavior such as establishing classroom rules, engaging students in collaborative problem solving, and trying to get students to take perspective of others' feelings (Drugli, Clifford, & Larsson, 2008). In contrast to the other studies, this study discovered teachers seldom used positive praise because teachers reported it was ineffective. Strategies these teachers used for more disruptive behaviors were planned ignoring (intentionally withholding attention), removal from the classroom, or physically holding the student until the student calmed.

In a qualitative case study of three general education teachers, three special education teachers, and three paraprofessionals who worked in the general education classroom with students with EBD, general education teachers identified the usefulness of setting limits and expectations, consistent routines, setting easily attainable goals, frequent verbal reinforcement for appropriate behaviors, planned ignoring of minor inappropriate behaviors, and verbal reminders (Lukowiak, 2010). Additionally, two of the three general educators reported creating their own special activities and privileges to reward student behavior, and two of the general education teachers reported the use of verbal reinforcement for positive behaviors as one of the

most valuable strategies. Interestingly, none of the general education teachers used individualized behavior plans, and left implementation of point systems to the special education teachers.

This indicates the possibility that general education teachers simply do not have the capacity to implement these more time intensive interventions or lack proper training (Lukowiak, 2010; Niesyn, 2009). The results of these studies may suggest that teachers sometimes resort to what Yell et al. (2013) refers to as the "cookbook approach" to solving behavior, where teachers use specific strategies for individual behaviors rather than a systematic approach to solving behavior (p. 243).

Teachers' experiences with students with EBD in the classroom give insight into the types of interactions they have with students, the types of behavior experienced in the classroom, and the many strategies and interventions they implement that may or may not be effective and evidenced-based. The experiences teachers have with behavior of students with EBD in the classroom serve to identify supports teachers need, effectiveness of types of interventions, and the resources needed to implement evidence-based strategies.

**Concluding Thoughts**

Examination of the literature reveals a proliferation of research on inclusion of SWD as a general category (Avramidis et al., 2000; Bender et al., 1995; Burke & Sutherland, 2004). The majority of the research on students with EBD in inclusive classrooms has been directed towards teacher attitudes and perceptions identified through quantitative studies, and the impact on inclusion of students with disabilities (Avramidis et al., 2000; Bender et al., 1995; Cook et al., 2007).

Inclusion of students with EBD has historically been founded on the objective of social inclusion and the idea of basic human rights (Simpson & Mundschenk, 2012). Since inclusion efforts are driven by policy, rather than science, general education teachers face complexity in navigating these issues, since inclusion has become the preferred method of instructing students with EBD. Moreover, general education teachers have little control over whether or not a student with EBD will be placed in their classroom. A study examining teachers' experiences in the midst of these situations is valuable, offering insight into how teachers handle the complexities and demands of educating students with EBD.

# Chapter 3: Methodology

This qualitative phenomenological study examined the experiences of three elementary general education teachers who had students with Emotional Behavior Disorder (EBD) in their classrooms. The purpose of this study was to learn about the experiences of general education teachers who educate students with EBD in the regular classroom, based on the legal requirements that students with EBD be included in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). Guiding this study was one predominant question with three related areas of investigation:

What do elementary teachers who are committed to inclusion practices describe as their lived experiences in supporting students with disabilities, particularly students with EBD?

d. What instructional practices do they value and find helpful for students with EBD?
e. How do these educators view success for students with EBD? How do they aim for those successes?
f. How do these teachers perceive administrative support for their inclusion efforts? What supports/resources do they say they need?

## Phenomenology

I framed this qualitative study through a phenomenological approach. The goal of phenomenology is to gain an understanding of participants' lived experience and through an exploration and explication of it, give it a deeper meaning (van Manen, 1997). It involves carefully describing how a person "makes sense of an experience and transforms experience into consciousness, both individually and as shared meaning" (Patton, 2002, p. 104). Further, the purpose of phenomenological research is to take one's lived experience and articulate the

"essence" of the experience through textual description (van Manen, 1997). I worked from these perspectives to capture teachers' perceptions through their lens of experience. My goal was to understand the commonalities across their efforts to include students with EBD, as well as to analyze what practices led them to achieve success (Creswell, 2018).

Phenomenological research "describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon" (Creswell, 2018, p. 75). Several examples of quality phenomenological studies indicate how useful phenomenology is for this purpose, as in Lohrmann and Bambara's (2006) study, which identified 14 general educators who experienced inclusion of students with challenging behavior in their classrooms. This phenomenological study captured both what and how these teachers experienced those challenging behaviors in the classroom (Creswell, 2018). By using a phenomenological approach, the authors were able to identify common experiences and beliefs teachers had about effective supports for students with EBD, the struggles they encountered with challenging behavior, and how they had grown as educators because they had included these students.

**Setting**

Small Springs School District (pseudonym) is nestled in an Oregon valley, between two demographically distinct suburban cities. It is located between two major highways and characterized by its considerable resources, evidenced not least in its impressive accomplishment of graduating 93% of the district's students on time in 2017-2018. The district's 9,000 students enjoy small class sizes and access to career and technical opportunities in high school. Small Springs School District's (SSSD) population is 12% students with disabilities, and less than 20% of students experience poverty, based on free/reduced lunch status.

What makes this school district especially unique in Oregon is its strong focus and commitment to inclusion for students with disabilities. Small Springs' theme is "Leading for All," and they have integrated Social Emotional Learning (SEL) into their classroom practices. Small Springs is a school district that honors diversity and inclusion of all students. Under the leadership of the Student Services Director, the district began its shift from segregated classrooms for students with disabilities, to inclusive classrooms ten years ago. In the last three years, the district has completely eliminated segregated settings for all students with disabilities. More than 85% of their students with disabilities are included in the general education classroom for more than 80% of their day, and less than 1% of students with disabilities are placed in segregated schools (Oregon Department of Education, 2018). For these reasons, SSSD is viewed as a leader of inclusion in the state, making it an intriguing place from which to recruit participants for this study.

**Participant Selection**

I used a purposive, criterion-based sampling strategy, enabling me to select participants who were first-through-fourth grade general educators who had taught at least one student in the classroom with a special education identification of Emotionally Disturbed, for two or more hours per day. Due to the developmental levels of students within these grade levels, and prevalence of behavior problems in grades one-through-four, I wanted to be able to talk with teachers who had experienced disruptive behavior. I sought to know what made teachers who included students with EBD successful, and how they reached success with these students.

**Key informants.** My first step in identifying participants was to identify and contact two key informants from the school district, the Human Resources Director, and the Director of Student Services. Key informants can be useful in phenomenological research because they hold

valuable information and can provide access to additional information if needed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Key informants should be knowledgeable the study's setting, have insight about potential participants and context, and understand the purpose of the questions being examined (Patton, 2002). They can also offer insight into which participants might be best to recruit, given the criterion for a study. That proved true for this study. I gained access to key informants for this study by sending an email to the Human Resources Director which described the purpose of the study (Appendix A). I scheduled a meeting with her to review my research plan, and she and I decided that the Director of Student Services and herself would be the key informants. They each had access to teacher performance information, student data, access to school principals, and direct observations of teachers in the district.

Once the key informants agreed to participate, they signed a confidentiality agreement (Appendix B to ensure that teachers' identities and participation would be kept confidential. These individuals helped me identify teachers who met selection criteria for this study, which mean they worked from their definitions of teachers who were successfully educating students with EBD. I understood that the ways the key informants defined success was based on their perceptions of success, not necessarily truth (Patton, 2002). Therefore, I guided this selection process by asking the key informants to focus on their knowledge of how well potential participant-teachers used positive behavior strategies, developed good relationships with EBD students, and demonstrated positive academic growth. The key informants named seven potential participants who met the criteria and provided me with those teachers' names, schools, grade levels taught, and contact information.

**Recruitment.** I recruited participant teachers through an informational letter which I sent via email (Appendix C). The letter explained the research study, the purpose and methods of the

research, and the way we would jointly participate in constructing meaning through interviews. I identified potential risks and shared how I would minimize them. This informed consent was important because my research did potentially place participants at risk. I also offered teachers a $25 Amazon gift card at the end of the interview process, to express appreciation for teachers' time.

Initially, I did not receive any responses. I sent each teacher a follow-up email and received four responses within two weeks of my initial email. Three of the four agreed to participate in the study and agreed to talk with me by phone to learn more. The fourth person declined to participate. After confirming their agreement to participate via email, I scheduled phone conversations with each teacher. During these conversations, I introduced myself, shared my professional background, and asked if they had any questions. I explained how I used key informants to select them, and who the key informants were. I told the participants that the key informants had signed a confidentiality statement for their protection.

Two of the three participants sounded excited about the opportunity and readily scheduled times to meet with me. The third participant shared her concerns about the protections of her identity. She feared her administrators would be able to read her transcripts and identify her in the final document. I described the process of how I would work to protect her identity, and reassured her that I would not share any identifiable data with anyone. I offered to provide the transcripts at her request following our interviews. I also offered to send her a completed dissertation similar in methodology to mine, so she could see how the information she might share might be written up. She agreed to think about it and said she would let me know over the winter break. Immediately following our conversation, I sent her an email with the consent form, as well as a completed phenomenological dissertation, which I obtained from George Fox

University's Digital Commons webpage. Two weeks after I sent her the email, she responded, agreed to participate, and we scheduled an interview. Recruitment of participants took approximately four weeks from the time of my initial email to my first interview.

**Data Sources and Gathering Procedures**

The sources of data in a qualitative study should offer a variety of ways to gather information and collect data (Creswell, 2018). It is an interconnected group of activities that should include several angles of look at developing answers to the research questions. I approached my data collection with these goals in mind.

**Interviews.** To understand the meaning of a participant's experience, context is essential (Seidman, 2013). In order to gain this contextual understanding, I conducted of a series of three, semi-structured, in-depth interviews with two of the participants. Due to one teacher's inability to schedule the third interview, I was able to hold two interviews with this third participant. These interviews constituted the key source of data for this study. These interviews focused in turn on teachers' professional history in the first interview, the details of their experience in the second interview, and their reflection on the meaning of their experience in the final interview (Seidman, 2013). I conducted each of these interviews face-to-face; each one was between 35-55 minutes in length. An interview protocol (Appendix D) with subsequent follow-up questions informed my time with teachers. Prior to the interviews, I provided participants the interview questions by email. All interviews were digitally recorded and professionally transcribed. This allowed for verbatim translation of teachers' words that I subsequently coded and analyzed.

**Researcher's notes.** Researcher's notes, a vital component to qualitative research, (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018), was another key data source for this study. I took notes to document and create rich descriptions of the context of the study and interviews. I took these

notes immediately following participant interviews, and included the location of the interview, participant demeanor and any non-verbal behavior I noted in response to each interview question. Any changes I made to interview questions during a given conversation were documented in these notes. In addition, these notes contained my critical reflections, and allowed me to document my own feelings and biases (Watt, 2007).

**Analytic memos.** Analytic memos were another source of data that crossed the collection and analysis stages of the research. Clarke (2005) states that "memos are sites of conversation with ourselves about our data" (p. 202). I used memos to capture key reflections on the emerging categories, themes, and impressions in the data. They contained reflections on how I personally related to the phenomenon, how codes and themes were generated and integrated, and any ethical dilemmas that arose (Saldaña, 2009). Saldaña (2009) suggests that analytic memos are another place where codes and categories can be found. By using descriptive titles and subtitles in analytic memos, I also used memos to look for additional categories and codes. During this study, I wrote six analytical memos after each of the first two interviews; an example of these can be found in Appendix F.

## Data Analysis Procedures

In order to gain a deeper understanding of participants' lived experiences, thorough data analysis was extremely important. I worked to accurately represented the stories and experiences of the participants while identifying common themes. I did this chiefly through coding. Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) state that the process of coding is a "method of discovery" that allows for data to be condensed into meaningful "chunks" (p. 71-73). This allows the researcher to identify reoccurring patterns and subsequently formulate those into pattern codes. Once I received the transcripts of the interviews, I read each one two times to get to know the data. I

made initial notations in the margins of the transcripts, with my research questions as a guide. I highlighted quotes and phrases that I anticipated would be relevant.

**In vivo coding.** A commonly-used coding method, in vivo coding prioritizes participant voice and can help pinpoint patterns in a particular setting (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). I re-read through each series of transcripts for each participant, chronologically. I placed distinctive terms in quotations in order to identify phrases or words that participants repeated, and were related to the research questions. I also highlighted significant participant statements.

**Emotion codes.** Interviewing teachers about their experiences with students with EBD in the classroom meant they often disclosed emotions they recalled or experienced. I re-read the transcripts and looked for words that described participants' emotions. I highlighted these emotions, and later categorized them into positive and negative sub-categories, in line with my findings from the literature review of how emotion is most often discussed in relation to this topic. Participants' own words during in vivo coding helped me identify and label the corresponding emotions, and understand participants' perspectives. I later grouped common emotions between participants.

**Value coding.** Value coding was the third way I worked to represent participants' values, attitudes, and beliefs about an experience (Saldaña, 2009). As I listened to participants' experiences with students with EBD, they articulated their values, attitudes, and beliefs about the work of educating these students. I read transcripts a fifth time and I highlighted statements or words that represented these values. I then coded these experiences into the three main categories: values, attitudes, and beliefs.

I further analyzed the research data by reading my analytic memos. I read

through each memo and highlighted emergent themes, patterns, codes, and concepts. By using descriptive titles and subtitles in analytic memos, I found additional categories and codes.

**Pattern codes and concept maps.** The second cycle of analysis involved the work of using pattern coding to identify categories and themes. Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) believe that pattern coding allows the researcher to create a "cognitive map, an evolving, more integrated schema for understanding…" (p. 86). To develop pattern codes, I used concept mapping to identify common themes and categories and the connections that existed between participants (Novak, 1998). I used both electronic and paper copies of transcripts and analytic memos. From these, I gathered the highlighted sections of data and categorized by research question located on a large piece of poster paper. I used post-it notes with words written on them that represented any values, beliefs, or emotions within the transcripts. I placed these sticky notes to a corresponding research question, and grouped chunks of data together to create sub-themes. These concept maps helped me to identify common themes and categories, and the connections that existed between participants.

**Member checks.** In order to determine that the data analysis and interpretations corresponded with participants' experiences, I provided participants with an advance opportunity to review memos about each one that articulated the data I analyzed from their series of interviews (Appendix E). After the final interview, I sent each one an analytic memo that highlighted the emergent themes from their data. This memo was accompanied by some questions for each one. First, I wanted to know if I had accurately portrayed their experiences. I also asked if they perceived that the memo gave justice to their experiences, and finally, whether they had any comments, objections, or additional details to provide. Each participant responded positively, and did not indicate any changes that were needed.

From these interviews and resulting analysis, I identified four major themes that included these teachers' experiences of including students with EBD in the general education classroom, which are elucidated in Chapter 4.

**Researcher's Reflections**

It is important to define the role of the researcher in qualitative research (Patton, 2002), cultivating the practice of self-awareness. As a researcher, I hold my own beliefs, perceptions, and experiences, which makes it impossible to eliminate bias. I approached this study with the knowledge that I have had experiences with students with EBD, and that ultimately influences how I interview participants, perceive their experiences, and interpret meanings. During this process, I strove to be my authentic self, true to my identity and relationship to the topic. I did this by sharing with participants about my own background, my current professional role, and experiences I have had with the phenomenon of including students with EBD. In this section, I discuss my efforts at bracketing these experiences, along with reflection on the ways my various professional roles may have influenced this research.

**Bracketing.** One challenge in phenomenological research is "bracketing," wherein the researcher works to set aside personal and professional experiences apart from the research process (Creswell, 2018). Creswell (2018) suggests that the researcher must decide when to add personal experiences into the study. However, Peshkin's (1988) work points to the impossibility of the researcher to eliminate subjectivity, advocating instead for searching out and unpacking one's subjectivity throughout the research process. I worked to both bracket my experiences while acknowledging my own subjectivity as a means of discovering anew what these teachers shared with me (Peshkin, 1988). Given that I am a fellow educator and administrator in special education, I was mindful that this influenced how I looked at and interpreted the data (Peshkin,

1988). I took note of significant emotions that reflected my subjectivity during the research process. I noted my feelings during and after interviews with the teachers in my researcher's notebook, and later included them in my analytic memos. At times during the process, I recognized and took note of how I surprised I was at the results. I knew that I had assumptions based on my own experiences about what the data would look like. I was careful to be aware the emotions and assumptions I surfaced did not influence the way I asked questions or interpreted data.

**Researcher's background.** I began my career in a self-contained classroom serving 14 students with EBD. I was an advocate for the inclusion of these students and sought to develop collaborative relationships with general education classroom teachers. I really enjoyed teaching students with EBD, although, at time it was challenging. I never felt as though I had enough support or resources. After my first two years of teaching in a segregated classroom, I was recruited to work in another local school district that was closer to my home. I had the opportunity there to create a new behavioral program and received a lot of support from my principal. In a district that had many segregated classrooms, I was fortunate to have a principal who held positive beliefs about inclusion, and was excited for the opportunity to start including students in the general education classroom. His support helped me build relationships with teachers, and move toward a more inclusive program in the school.

Hoping to gain more experience as a special education teacher, I spent my last two years as a special education teacher in a resource room, serving students across several categories of disabilities. During that time, I was lucky to have a district administrator who coached me during difficult IEP meetings. He quickly became my strongest advocate and encouraged me to seek a leadership role in special education. This inspired me to apply for a coaching position at the

district office that allowed me to gain leadership skills and the ability to guide other special education teachers through the special education process. At the same time, I applied to an administrative licensure program at a local university.

Over the next two years, I successfully completed my program and received my administrative license. The summer I received my licensure, I applied for a special education administrative position in a school district that had a reputation for including students with disabilities. After the interview for the position, I remember driving home, being so excited about what a great opportunity this would be. However, I knew it was a competitive position and I doubted my experience. Surprisingly, on that same drive home, I received a phone call with a job offer. I was both elated and nervous for this new journey, a job I have now worked in for the past ten years. The roles I have held in education have given me several opportunities to work with students with disabilities, and particularly students with EBD, in the classroom. My professional experiences over the last 17 years have shaped how I view the world and the experiences of others. Consequently, my professional experiences created a subjectivity that influenced the way I interpret, record, or analyze data.

**How I came to this research.** I believe that teachers believe in the ability of students to show growth, both academically and emotionally. I have spoken with general education teachers about their successes and concerns for educating students with EBD. I have seen the challenges teachers face with constant demands and little time to receive professional development or implement practice. Conversely, I have also seen some teachers as being ill-equipped to manage a classroom, or create the structure necessary for students with EBD to be successful. There are times I worked with teachers who did not believe in including students with EBD, and were resistant to learning new strategies.

I have been in an administrative role in special education for the last ten years; the past two years, I have served in the role of the Director of Student Services. I have learned a lot about educating students with disabilities, inclusive settings, and serving students and families. I chose this topic, in accordance with George Fox University's Doctor of Education requirements, to further develop my professional knowledge and to contribute to the existing knowledge base in this field.

In my role as the Director of Student Services, I now see the bigger picture and have been focused on supporting general education teachers who include students with EBD. As a director, I am responsible to provide resources to students and teachers, rather than just advocate for students alone. I am in a position to advocate for system-level changes that support appropriate professional development for teachers, particularly successful behavioral strategies for engaging with students with EBD. At the same time, I am responsible to ensure students with EBD have access to their education in the LRE. In my role as director, I am often pulled by these various priorities in the district. While I want to support teachers and students and promote inclusive classrooms, I must also maintain a responsible financial budget and meet the legal requirements of IDEA. This means I must strike a delicate balance between sometimes opposing priorities.

I have heard stories from teachers about students who disrupt the classroom and how they feel they lack support and training for supporting children with EBD. These discussions of inclusion are sometimes fraught with emotions and strong opinions about educating students with EBD. At one time, my own experiences with students with EBD, along with my personal beliefs of creating equitable experiences for them, led me to believe in a full inclusion model for educating students with EBD. However, as I have listened to teachers' voices and observed their

experiences teaching students with EBD, both in my job and within this study, I have struggled to envision how successful inclusion for these students will work.

As the trend towards inclusion of students with EBD increases, I became more motivated to do this study given that teachers' voices have not been well-represented in the research. My position has allowed me to see the complexities that exist for inclusion of students with EBD, and how critical the need is for teacher voice. Learning from the experiences of teachers who include students with EBD can help to improve the experiences of teachers and students. It is my hope that this study will contribute to the larger body of inclusion research and provide insights into how to successfully include students with EBD.

**Trustworthiness and Credibility**

It is essential for qualitative researchers to establish the credibility of their studies (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Member checking is one of the most critical methods to establish credibility and involves taking data and interpretation back to participants to check for accuracy (Lincoln & Guba, 1989). Creswell (2009) suggests that member checks are best done with "polished" data (p. 191). In order to determine that the data analysis and interpretations corresponded with participants' experiences, I conducted member checks with analytic memos indicating a description of the participant, a sample of a textural description of an experience related to one of the research questions, and a sample of a direct quotation taken from the participants' transcripts. I provided this memo by email and asked participants to review it. All three participants believed that I had provided accurate details and did not offer any comments, feedback, or changes.

Another method I used to ensure trustworthiness of this research was creating an audit trail (Creswell & Miller, 2000) by accounting for all research decisions and activities I made

during the research process. I noted clear, chronological documentation of these events in my researcher's notebook. To ensure credibility, I noted my data collection methods, and analytic decisions. I reviewed my audit trail with a professional peer in the doctoral program whom I trusted to objectively review my work and question the logic of my inferences, check for researcher bias, and ensure I offered good justification for methodological decisions and findings (Schwandt & Halpern, 1988). To further establish credibility, this peer reviewed and provided critical feedback, support, and served as a "sounding board for ideas" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 129).

**Research Ethics**

Prior to conducting the study, I obtained permission from George Fox University's Institutional Review Board (Appendix G), as well as the participating school district. I obtained a letter of informed consent from each participant and a letter of confidentiality from the key informants. To safeguard participants' confidentiality, I removed any identifiers from the data and used pseudonyms of the participants' choice. I selected codes for data documents in place of any identifying information of the participants, and presented findings in a way that personal identities could not be decoded. To further reduce risk to my participants during the research process, all raw data, transcripts, audio recordings, and research notes were kept in a locked file cabinet. Once analyzed, raw data will be archived and destroyed after five years.

**Summary**

Phenomenology aims at exploring a participant's experience, in order to understand it and give it deeper meaning (van Manen, 1997). I used phenomenology to learn about the experiences of three teachers to better understand their perceptions of experiences of including students with EBD in the general education classroom. This phenomenological study focused on

the perspectives of teachers and offers significant insights into practices teachers' value for students with EBD, how they aim for success with these students, and what administrative support they need.

# Chapter 4: Findings

I aimed at gaining a deep understanding of what practices participating teachers valued for their students with EBD. I also sought to understand how they viewed success for students with EBD, and the ways they perceived administrative support around these issues. I focused and structured this study around one predominant research question, with three sub questions:

1. What do elementary teachers who are committed to inclusion practices describe as their lived experiences in supporting students with disabilities, particularly students with EBD?
    a. What instructional practices do they value and find helpful for students with EBD?
    b. How do these educators view success for students with EBD? How do they aim for those successes?
    c. How do these teachers perceive administrative support for their inclusion efforts? What supports/resources do they say they need?

Three general education elementary teachers who had included at least one student with an EBD during the 2018-2019 school year participated in this interview-based study. In this chapter, I share a profile of each participant, which notes their professional background and their perceived area of expertise. I identify the themes resulting from an analysis of the data and use descriptions, quotes, and supporting documentation to illustrate teachers' experiences. Four major themes were evident across the data. They include the practices teachers valued, the ways teachers aimed for success, administrative support, and advice to fellow teachers.

## Description of Participants

Participants all came from the same school district, and each had between six and twelve years of teaching experience. Each one had included one or more students with EBD in their classroom over the past several years. In order to protect participants' identity, I used pseudonyms in this document when referring to them by name. One participant personally selected a pseudonym, and two participants asked me to select for them. What follows is a table summarizing demographic data for them, along with descriptions of each teacher's personal teaching history, self-identified area of expertise, and a bit of their personal stories.

**General Demographic Background Information**

Table 1 provides demographic information about the three participating teachers from Small Springs School District.

Table 1. Demographic Information about Participants

| Name | Age | Years of teaching experience | Endorsement(s) | Current grade level assignment |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Isabella | 34 | 12 years | Early Childhood Education<br>Special Education | First-grade general education teacher |
| Bobbi | 42 | 9 years | Early Childhood Education | First-grade-second-grade blend |
| Jack | 40 | 10 years | Early Childhood Education | Fourth-grade general education teacher |

**Isabella**

I first met Isabella when we arranged an interview at her home during evening hours. Isabella had a young son who went to bed around 7:00 pm, so we arranged for that time. When I

walked up to Isabella's porch, I noticed porch rockers and a welcome sign. Isabella, 34 years old, fair-skinned, and small in stature, opened the front door with a warm smile. She offered me a glass of water as we sat down at her dining table. I noticed remnants of dinner, coloring books on the counter, and the smell of a vanilla candle. As began to share her story, she smiled and exuded an air of confidence.

Isabella began teaching in Florida when she was 22 years old. She taught first grade for two years before going back to school to earn her master's degree in special education, along with a dual certification in English as a second language. Isabella continued to teach first grade before her husband got a new job and they moved to Oregon. Isabella did not have any family in Oregon, but she felt reassured that her husband's family would be close. A native of southern California, Isabella remembered how nervous she was about the rainy and cold Oregon days. She chuckled as she expressed discontent about the long winters, but that she loved the access to nearby mountains and beaches.

Despite her reluctance to move and start a new job, Isabella immediately found a position as a special education teacher in a rural district in Oregon. She described with fondness how that community was dynamic, with a small-town vibe, and only one elementary school. Isabella described her role as enriching, because she was able to support many different types of students in a blended learning environment. This was Isabella's first experience as a special education teacher, and the first time she had experienced severe student behaviors.

With a low, calm tone, Isabella described some of the behaviors she had observed and experienced with students with EBD. One student was named Riley. Riley's father had recently gone to jail, and Riley came to school late each day. Isabella remembered how Riley would storm into the classroom, and begin pushing things off other students' desks. Riley would throw

chairs, and threaten other students. Isabella spoke with sadness as she explained how hard she had tried to help Riley.

Two years later, through a mutual connection, Isabella was recruited for a special education teaching position in SSSD. She was excited for the opportunity because SSSD was closer to her home, and she and her husband had been eager to start a family. Although she felt apprehensive, she accepted the position in a segregated classroom for third-through-fifth graders with Emotional Behavior Disorders. Isabella spoke confidently about how much support she and the students in her classroom received. She felt the wraparound services, such as speech language, mental health, physical therapy, and occupational therapy, helped her feel successful as a teacher. And while she spoke about the strong team of specialists she had, she also remembered how disconnected she felt to the general education environment and the other teachers.

During the next three years, Isabella was a part of Small Spring's shift from segregated classrooms to inclusive classrooms. Sheepishly, Isabella explained how this shift altered the support her segregated classroom had received. She saw wraparound services get drastically reduced, while the district slowly transitioned her students with EBD back to their home schools and general education classrooms. She believed this was the right thing to do, but it had a negative impact on her segregated classroom. Even so, Isabella smiled broadly when she said, "I believed that my students had real opportunities to make connections in their home schools."

With the elimination of segregated special education classrooms in Small Springs, Isabella decided to become a general education first-grade teacher, a position in which she has taught for the past two years. Isabella snickered when she said that over the last two years, she no longer had to convince other teachers to include students with EBD, but she could prove that

it could be done. Isabella spoke humbly when she identified her greatest strength as a teacher, was her ability to support students with behavior challenges.

**Jack**

I first met Jack at George Fox University. Jack lived nearby the university, and we agreed it was a convenient place to meet. A well-dressed 40-year-old with a slim build, Jack walked in and shook my hand with a wide grin. Immediately, I felt an energy and excitement emanating from Jack. At the same time, Jack seemed somewhat nervous. He followed me into a conference room as we exchanged small bits of personal information. Jack excitedly expressed interest in my research, and continued to tell me how happy he was to participate, demonstrating an affable personality with a small hint of charm. With a grin on his face, Jack spoke freely about his professional and personal background.

Jack started his teaching career in a charter school in an urban district where he taught first and second grades. He leaned back in his chair as he described his time at the charter school as one where he had a lot of autonomy as a teacher and was able to be creative. Jack felt that beginning his teaching career in a charter school gave him a good introduction to teaching. Over the following three years, Jack earned his master's degree in education while he continued to teach at the charter school.

One day, Jack received a phone call from a friend, who asked him if he was interested in teaching in Thailand. Jack spoke with excitement as he shared the opportunity to teach abroad, which he accepted, and subsequently taught first grade for two years in Bangkok. During all of our interviews together, Jack frequently referred to these two years teaching in Thailand as having a big influence on him as a teacher and as a person. He emphasized how fortunate he felt to have that experience and how it let him see how important culture was, both inside and outside

of the classroom. He spoke modestly about how his experience in Thailand gave him an experience of being a stranger in another country, enabling him to better appreciate the difficulty he anticipated students felt when they immigrated to the United States. He spoke fondly of the relationships he made with teachers and staff, and how his Thai friends had become his family. Although housing costs were expensive on a teacher's salary in Thailand, Jack spoke enthusiastically about all the site seeing and traveling he was able to do. After returning from Thailand, Jack accepted a first-grade position in SSDD, where he was for three years before moving to fourth grade two years ago. Jack described teaching in Small Springs as a remarkable experience.

When asked about his own experience in school as a kid, Jack remembered it as a place when things kept him grounded as his life outside school crumbled. His parents divorced at his age of six and he had to move to a new town, which was difficult. When Jack started a new school, he began to find his place and sense of belonging, because school was free from the worries and stress he had at home. Void of pretention, Jack said that as an adult, he now understood that he was privileged to go to school, and it be a place he loved. He found school to be a place he could explore and do fun things, surrounded by caring teachers. Recognizing that not every student has that same experience, Jack approached teaching from conviction that he wanted every student in his classroom to have that safety and support.

Jack spoke modestly when he told me that he perceived his area of expertise was classroom culture, describing his daily classroom schedule and classroom routines with enthusiasm. Jack proudly told me that he begins each day in his classroom with a mantra for kids to shout: "We will have fun!" With composure and self-assuredness, Jack said that having a strong classroom culture was what guided his students each day.

**Bobbi**

I met Bobbi at her favorite coffee shop in a quaint town 30 miles North of SSSD. With curly red locks and black-rimmed eye glasses, Bobbi looked up from the table where she was working and greeted me with a smile. On the table was a stack of math worksheets she had been grading. Bobbi ordered her favorite drink, a white chocolate mocha with no whip, while making small talk with me about her love of the town, with its diversity and overabundance of restaurants, cafes, and pubs. She enjoyed walking to the coffee shop on Saturdays so she could plan her upcoming week in the classroom.

Bobbi began her teaching career at the age of 33, in a private Catholic school. Born and raised Catholic, Bobbi admitted that she rarely attended mass. Both Bobbi's parents were teachers, and her mother had been a special education teacher. Bobbi's parents inspired her be a teacher, and she enjoyed her years at the private school. However, she longed for a teaching position in a public-school setting, stating her desire to work in a district with more resources for students and teachers. After three years there, Bobbi remembered hesitantly applying for a job in SSSD. She knew the 30-mile commute would result in long days and a lot of time stuck in traffic. But after doing some thorough research on Small Springs, Bobbi decided to apply. She recalled the excitement she felt when she accepted a position to teach first grade. She described her daily commute to Small Springs as a time she used to listen to audio books and reflect on her day.

Bobbi considered herself lucky to have only 24 students in her classroom, and could not remember a time when Small Springs had not practiced inclusion. She confessed that teaching in an inclusive district was challenging, but the resources the district provided to teachers were like no other district. Bobbi smiled when she told me that she perceived herself as having an

expertise and passion for teaching reading and writing. Without conviction, Bobbi also said she believed she had improved her classroom management skills, which she attributed to the challenging experiences she had with a student with EBD three years earlier.

Shaking her head, Bobbi spoke about the new landscape of teaching and her perception that the behavior challenges teachers faced have led many of them to feel demoralized. Bobbi spoke confidently and strongly about the need for advocacy for teachers who included students with EBD in the classroom. She believed that children and families were facing growing societal, financial, and interpersonal pressures. Regardless, Bobbi seemed genuine when she said she felt blessed to work in a school that helped her keep a safe classroom and develop a community of learners.

**Themes**

Through these interviews, participants shared their experiences with students with EBD, their values and beliefs about inclusive education, practices they valued and found useful, and how they reached success with students with EBD. Teachers also shared the administrative support they received and what more they needed. Lastly, teachers offered advice to their fellow teachers who include students with EBD. The interviews and resulting analysis enabled me to organize the findings around those four major areas. Practices, successes, administrative support, and teachers' advice to their colleagues, provide the basis for an explanation of data that follows. It includes both textural description and supporting documentation, along with quotes from teachers' interviews.

**Practices Teachers Valued**

The first main theme is constructed around what these teachers perceived as valuable and useful practices for students with EBD who were included in the classroom. These teachers

identified evidence-based practices that are supported in the literature. Their words revealed that using social emotional learning (SEL) practices on a regular basis was the foundation for helping students with EBD be successful. SEL included problem solving, self-regulation strategies, social skills curriculum, and breaks. In addition to SEL, the teachers highlighted classroom community building, and the use of behavior intervention plans as practices they found effective. In the section that follows, I outline these practices and the ways they impacted students with EBD in the classroom. I also discuss how prioritizing safety empowered teachers to respond to classroom disruptions carefully and effectively.

**Social emotional learning.** SEL has demonstrated positive outcomes for students with EBD (Durlak, et al., 2011). SEL has grown in popularity as a comprehensive system to teach students how to understand and regulate their emotions, maintain positive relationships, and make good choices. It encompasses practices such as problem solving, relationship building, direct social skill instruction, and self-regulation strategies (Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2013). When asked to identify and describe practices they found to be successful for students with EBD, the teachers in this study primarily talked about the evidence-based practices embedded in SEL.

***Problem solving.*** Teachers referenced a variety of problem-solving methods and prioritized helping students solve problems in a collaborative manner. One method to which they frequently referred was Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS). Described by Ross Greene (2009), CPS approaches student behavior as a result of "lagging" skills. It involves multiple steps, but it is used to address behavior by teaching skills, rather than rewarding behavior. Two of the three teachers had used CPS in one way or another in the classroom, and described it as a

way for the teacher and student to come together, identify a problem, and come up with mutually agreeable solution. Isabella had confidence in CPS for students with EBD in the classroom.

> Sometimes, coming up with a plan collaboratively with a child can be powerful thing. It can help when you try and change behavior. I would say those are things that I mostly rely on, especially when dealing with students with EBD. (Isabella, 1/2/19).

Jack highlighted that negative behaviors were evidence that a student did not have the skills to succeed. He used CPS as a restorative practice for all students in his classroom, but believed that, "when we need to restore safety and concern, it also means that one student may need a lot more support in building skills" (Jack, 1/23/19).

Other ways teachers taught problem solving skills were through teamwork and working through real-life situations and activities within the classroom. Bobbi taught students about "I" statements in order to express how they were feeling or describe a problem they had. With the use of a visual sentence frame, Bobbi believed that this was a significant way her students solved problems both independently and corporately.

A common view of amongst teachers was that consequences for students with EBD were not particularly useful. Jack described how he felt about consequences this way:

> My understanding is...when there's confrontation, when there's an incident, we can gather the people involved and we can talk it out...then we solve the problem. I love that idea. I'm not sure that it's [behavior] not going to happen again, and I don't believe consequences or discipline is going to not make it happen again. I don't think there's any evidence that that really works. (Jack, 1/23/19).

This insight, about the ineffectiveness of consequences, is important because students with EBD typically face more consequences in school than other students, and have higher rates of

suspension and expulsion. Instead, teachers emphasized students and teachers working together to solve problems, before consequences were even necessary. Problem-solving was focused on the priority of keeping their classrooms a safe place to be, which became a natural way to include students with EBD. Teachers viewed the interactive process of problem solving between student and teacher, or student to student, as a way to teach skills and move forward.

***Self-regulation strategies.*** Teaching self-regulation was a practice teachers used to help students with EBD to manage and control behavior and emotions. All three teachers shared similar methods to teach self-regulation in the classroom, informed by their district's training in the Zones of Regulation (ZOR) (Kuypers, 2011). ZOR is a curriculum designed to help students recognize when they are in different emotional "zones." There are four zones, each represented by a color. The red zone represents anger or explosive behavior, the yellow zone represents elevated emotions but more self-control, the blue zones signifies a feeling of lethargy, and the green zone represents a calm but alert state of emotion.

There was a sense of confidence amongst teachers when they spoke about the use of the ZOR. Bobbi saw ZOR as a practice that took place school-wide, and prepared her students for their best learning. She described the calming techniques, cognitive strategies, and sensory tools students used.

> [For one of my students,] it means doing some breathing, talking it out, taking a walk, using and playing something with his hands to help him calm down, to relax or have him read a book. When he's got a safe body and he's back in the green zone, then he can come back in (Bobbi, 1/21/19).

As I talked with teachers, I heard them place importance on using ZOR as a way for students to identify and understand their emotions. Jack talked about the idea of using ZOR to normalize

emotions and behavior in the classroom. When I asked Jack what he meant by normalizing behavior, he said that by teaching all students that emotions were a natural and normal part of the human condition, he could build students' capacity for empathy for students with EBD.

***Social skills curriculum.*** Teachers described the importance of directly teaching students social skills. They identified the use of the Second Step social skills curriculum (Committee for Children, 2011) as a key practice for social skills instruction. Second Step is an evidence-based, universal violence prevention curriculum that teaches pro-social skills through daily/weekly lessons using role-plays. Lessons were traditionally taught by school counselors in the district, but Jack was one of the three teachers who felt strongly about teaching the curriculum himself, which he did weekly on Fridays. He felt it was important for him to teach the curriculum so that students understood he was invested in their emotional health. Isabella pointed out that, prior to the inclusion model when students with EBD were segregated into specialized classrooms, they were denied opportunities to participate in the Second Step curriculum. Once students with EBD were included, Isabella especially enjoyed having the school counselor come in and do lessons in her general education classroom. Bobbi felt strongly that her own participation in the weekly lessons from the school counselor helped her learn from the counselor, and enabled her to reinforce those skills in the classroom:

> I think that it is important for me to understand what language she's using and it's important to be consistent on the message and the language. If children hear something from one student or one teacher and hear it differently from me, they may not understand the connection. It's important to have the same language when you speak to children about solving problems or about what's expected. They have more exposure to it, they understand it better, and the message is consistent. (Bobbi, 1/21/19).

Bobbi's statements suggest the significance of teacher participation in social skills instruction, which enabled her to integrate the skills students needed into their daily practice.

***Breaks.*** Teachers repeatedly referred to the importance for students with EBD to have breaks within the day. Breaks helped students self-regulate and use the strategies they knew with the ZOR and Second Step curricula. They frequently spoke of the use of breaks as a way to minimize classroom disruptions and provide students with EBD the opportunity to gain lifelong coping skills. Isabella described a student with frequent disruptive behavior who used breaks regularly, pointing out how breaks improved inclusiveness:

> He takes sensory breaks and it's totally appropriate. He'll leave the classroom, get regulated and then come and join us. Some days he takes lots of breaks, some days he gets stuck on a break and doesn't come back. Some days he doesn't really need that many breaks. It just depends. Providing him those tools at his home school, in his first-grade classroom, with me, with his peers, all of those things help to keep him included. (Isabella, 1/2/19).

There were two ways teachers described breaks: in the classroom, and outside of the classroom. They perceived that breaks enabled students with EBD to express emotions, regulate emotions, and get their sensory needs met. Each teacher described a space in their classrooms where students could take breaks. They perceived that this space in the classroom gave students an option to regulate their emotions while remaining in class.

Having a space outside of the classroom was also important for teachers. If students with EBD refused to take a break in the classroom, or they demonstrated unsafe behavior, they were prompted or escorted to take a break outside of the classroom. Jack acknowledged that having students take a break outside of the classroom did happen, although infrequently. He perceived

breaks outside of the classroom as a last resort. He acknowledged the importance of having a student leave the classroom in unsafe circumstances, but believed it sent a message that students did not belong in the classroom. Bobbi described how important the outside breaks were for her:

> If he's just escalated, running around the class, throwing stools, kicking things, screaming, and tearing things up, and he refuses to calm down and be in a calm-down break, then we escort him out. And we warn him, "Oh, it looks like your body's not being safe. If your body's not going to be safe then we're going to escort you out. You can take a calm-down break right here." So, we remind him of the…the options. (Bobbi, 1/21/19).

Bobbi's description signifies the need for teachers to have alternatives when students' emotions led to their physically unsafe behavior. I heard teachers emphasize the need for breaks as a regular part of students' routines, yet they acknowledged that breaks looked different for different situations.

**Classroom community.** When teachers shared their classroom experiences, they held the common belief that inclusion work was characterized by a sense of belonging and acceptance in the classroom. Teachers believed that quality inclusion was not just about the physical placement of students with EBD, but based on creating an environment that supported all learners. They accomplished this by creating classroom communities, places where friendships were promoted, cooperation encouraged, and rituals/routines supported a sense of belonging.

***Classroom meetings.*** Regular classroom meetings were one of the key ways teachers created community. Each teacher had their own personal way to structure their classroom community. All three teachers had regular classroom meetings, either at the beginning of the day, end of day, or both. Within these meetings, teachers reviewed schedules, calendars, and problem solved. This was particularly important for students with EBD, because they needed

clear structure. Both Isabella and Jack used their morning meetings as a way to have fun and engage in experiences together. Jack described the purpose for rituals and routines within his classroom:

> If I want to get students to act in a certain way, to accomplish a certain thing, I can try to set up this structure that is restrictive, or I can spend some time kind of normalizing success, having fun, being around each other and enjoying each other, appreciating differences. I feel like both rituals and routines kind of, for me at least, goes into classroom culture. (Jack, 1/15/19).

Jack's words reflect his desire to teach all students to respect learning differences. He believed that by providing students with EBD the opportunity to reach and demonstrate success, students and teachers would come to see this as a natural characteristic of students with EBD. He worked from a position of understanding that disruptive behavior had become the norm for students with EBD, and he aimed to change the norm.

The experiences that teachers shared revealed that classroom meetings were a way to structure and review expectations for the day, and communicate the daily schedule to students. Students with EBD responded well to the structure and predictability provided to them during the classroom meetings.

***Social dynamics.*** When teachers managed social dynamics in a classroom community, they perceived that students experienced improved peer interactions in the classroom, reduced problem behaviors, and positive peer connections. Students with EBD practiced the SEL skills they had learned when teachers intentionally designed social interactions through cooperative groups, and the use of partners during instruction. Positive social peers helped to model pro-social behavior, and positively influence the behavior of students with EBD. This helped create

natural accountability in the classroom, one where the teacher was not always considered an enforcer. Isabella described a time when direct peer feedback to a student with EBD was more powerful than an adult intervention:

> Jason's super motivated by peers. If you can get a peer to redirect him or say, "Stop doing it like that, " he'll quickly make a change. A lot of times if an adult comes alongside him, he'll ramp it up like "oh, game on," you know? (Isabella, 1/8/19).

Isabella's comments point to the influence teachers believed peers had on the behavior with students with EBD, and teachers leveraged peer relationships in the classroom to promote good behavior. When I asked teachers why they thought peer relationships were so influential for students with EBD, they said that they perceived students with EBD wanted to belong and be accepted by their peers, which resulted in their improved behavior.

While interviewing teachers, each shared an example of what they believed to be an authentic and mutually beneficial relationship between a student with EBD and a peer in the classroom. Bobbi shared the encouragement and support peers provided to a student with EBD in her classroom.

> You know, in fact, it's really great because the other kids might help Johnny. Sometimes, if he's frustrated about something, maybe an app isn't working right, he's frustrated with a math page, or he doesn't want to do his handwriting, sometimes kids will come in and say, "Hey, it's okay, Johnny, you can do this." They're really great. They're really supportive of him. (Bobbi 1/29/19).

Bobbi's example illustrates the importance of connection between students with EBD and their peers. She recognized the power students had to assist students with EBD with little adult

support. These relationships were perceived as valuable for students with EBD, yet also valuable for all the students in the classroom.

**Behavior intervention plans.** All three participants had experience in developing Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) for students who needed them. Isabella and Bobbi frequently referenced individual student behavior plans for students with EBD. These plans were developed in collaboration with the special education case manager, general education teacher, and any specialists. Isabella believed that being involved as the teacher in the development of the plan was important for including students with EBD.

> They're with you all day, you have to be a part of this plan, you know? I mean, whether he's taking breaks or not, I get to see how he interacts with all of those support people. I think being a part of that plan, and having a voice in that plan, is really important (Isabella, 1/8/19).

I asked teachers to help me understand how behavior plans helped them with students with EBD. Bobbi and Isabella shared that it was important to implement a behavior plan so they could respond to behavior appropriately, and take steps to help students regulate their emotions. It was seen as critical to the success of students with EBD because, when followed consistently, students responded positively. They emphasized that a plan needed to be developed with a team, with input from the special education case manager, the paraprofessional, parents, and themselves. The collaborative development of a BIP was the way teachers responded to behavior consistently, saw behavioral growth for students, and felt successful as a teacher.

**Room clears.** Although not identified by the teachers as a common practice, room clears were mentioned several times during my interviews, as one way teachers responded to a crisis in a classroom. When a student with EBD demonstrated behaviors that put other students at harm,

the majority of the students left the classroom for a short time, to decrease the chance of injuries. This approach was typically implemented when teachers felt all other options to de-escalate the behaviors had been exhausted. This meant that teachers found an alternate learning space for their students when a student with EBD demonstrated physically unsafe behaviors, such as throwing chairs, property destruction in the classroom, and physical aggression. Isabella shared that room clears were a necessary part of including students with EBD.

> I think if it's happening on a regular basis, then you have you have to do something different than just being responsive to the behavior. You're not preventing the behavior. You have to kind of backup a step, you know, how did you get there? What's the antecedent before the behavior happens? I think you have work to do with either the student or the class, whatever it may be. I think if you're getting to point where he's disrupting reading then you're not looking at it through the right lens. It's difficult to get ahead of it when that [clearing the classroom] becomes the norm. I think that would be the time where it would be disruptive and you need to do something different. (Isabella, 2/6/19).

Isabella's words demonstrate how teachers reflected on room clears, and sought ways to prevent it from happening. Jack shared that his threshold for removing students or calling administration might be different than other teachers. While Isabella and Jack shared that room clears happened infrequently for them, Bobbi explained that there were times when this occurred on a daily basis in her classroom. She emphatically described the emotional stress this caused in her classroom and for her as a teacher, and how she did not agree with the strategy.

> I had to clear my class as he was throwing chairs and destroying things, and my kids were fearful and said, "Oh my God. What's going on? Oh. What is he doing? I'm scared, Ms.

> B." We all have to stop our learning, clear the classroom and let this kid destroy everything and scare my kids. No! That is horrible. Horrible for the students. Horrible for their learning. Horrible for that child. Horrible for me as a teacher. You don't recover from something like that in five minutes. It takes time to recover from that emotional stress, physically, mentally, emotionally (Bobbi, 2/2/19).

Bobbi's experience revealed the need she had for a sense of control of her classroom, while acknowledging the pressure it exerted on her and her students. Although room clears were perceived as less than ideal, Isabella and Jack accepted and adjusted to them, while Bobbi unequivocally thought they could be the best outcome for all:

> My number one job as a teacher is to keep my kids safe. And if that means escorting... this student that is not safe out of my classroom, so I can keep a calm classroom and keep my kids safe and learning, that is what I will do. I will escort that child out of my class. I will not clear my classroom and let that child stay in my classroom and destroy things, and scare my kids and throw chairs. No, no, I will not do that. I will escort that child out and I will continue maintaining calm...a classroom of learning and where my kids are safe. (Bobbi, 2/2/19).

Teachers in this study spoke confidently about the practices they used and found useful. They had a unique way to implement evidence-based practices within the classroom, and they appreciated the autonomy they were given to create their own unique learning spaces. Classroom-wide and individual practices, were perceived to lead to successful outcomes for students with EBD, and that ensured safety. Teachers recognized these practices as valuable because they were relatively simple to implement, demonstrated short term successful outcomes,

maintained the dignity of students with EBD, and could be consistently integrated into the general education classroom.

**Aiming for Success**

The second major theme in the findings is built around how teachers viewed success for their students with EBD. Including students with EBD can be challenging (Simpson & Mundeschenk, 2012), a problem that can be compounded by teachers wondering about their ability to help students with behavioral problems be successful (Clunies-Ross, et al., Downing, 2007; Oregon Education Association, 2019). These teachers did not seem to align with these research findings, however. Their words indicated that they aimed for the success of these students, for all students, and reached it on a regular basis. They did not subscribe to the view that simply preventing their EBD students from disrupting the classroom was the only goal. Rather, they prioritized academic, social, and emotional success for EBD students with just as high of a priority as they held it for their other students. They defined success for these students as comprised of many things; reciprocal relationships students with EBD had with peers, academic progress, increased participation, and the acquisition of social and emotional skills. In the section that follows, I outline their beliefs about inclusion and what students with EBD can do. I also discuss how their relationships with other teachers and paraprofessional support enabled them to help their EBD students be successful in all aspects of classroom life.

**Beliefs about inclusion.** All three teachers had very consistent beliefs about inclusion. Isabella described it as ensuring a level playing field, where educational supports look different for some than for others, but every student has the same opportunities. Bobbi believed inclusion meant that all types of students were welcome in the classroom, despite their differences. Jack described what inclusion meant to him in this way:

> To me, inclusion means your neighborhood school is your neighborhood. It's your school. It means your grade level classroom is your classroom, and that's where you belong, unless someone can make a strong argument you are going to be better served in a different area. That to me is what inclusion is; to accept others, to be patient, to understand people make mistakes, and that people are trying their best. (Jack, 1/15/19).

Jack's words here point to his belief that inclusion was not hard or challenging so much as a matter of what it means to belong. For him, inclusion was an acceptance, a making-space for others, just as one would wish for themselves.

Isabella felt that the behavioral skills her students with EBD learned were just as important as skills all other students received. She saw it as something that changed her building's culture:

> I think our whole school benefits from having this inclusive model and this inclusive culture. We all have grown in our understanding of students with disabilities, but also, they're not just students with disabilities, you know? We all have those moments where we're having a hard time and we're not in control of our feelings. It's kind of normalized it, and also built empathy. (Isabella, 2/6/19).

Isabella's words show her belief that the benefits of inclusion were far-reaching. For her, inclusion was about recognizing that people have similarities, and that self-awareness of emotions students and teachers held, was woven into the fabric of her school's culture.

***Inclusion as a norm.*** As I interviewed the teachers, I had a sense that inclusion was not an option for them, but an idea that was both expected and accepted. While Isabella and Jack had been a part of the district's transition to full inclusion, Bobbi said it was what she had always known. Isabella also perceived that the district had reached a point where inclusion was the new normal.

> I think we've moved to the other side. I can say most teachers really do believe that this was just the norm. It is strange if we get students who have "self -contained" on their paperwork. We don't have that environment, obviously. We have those supports, but we don't have that place, per se. It reminds me that not everyone is doing this yet. But when we do have those students, we give those opportunities. (Isabella, 2/6/19)

The district was progressive and deliberate in its approach to inclusion. For Isabella, inclusion was normal, something that each student was entitled to, yet not always practiced in neighboring districts.

**Beliefs about students with EBD.** Teachers in this study wanted students to do well; they believed that students with EBD could be just like the other kids. They were self-reflective, and strived to understand what was behind the behaviors of students with EBD. Their belief that students with EBD should be included in the general education classroom helped them persist through challenges with these students. In my interviews, teachers pointed to a particular belief and mindset that was the pre-requisite for inclusion. Jack believed that teachers could learn a lot

of strategies, but if they did not have the right mindset, including students with EBD would be difficult:

> It's hard when you're talking about beliefs and mindsets, because those are pretty ingrained, or tough things to change rapidly. I think it takes a lot of stepping back and kind of looking at it. I think it's much more about mindset, and just really working on it. (Jack, 1/30/19).

***Hidden label.*** Special education eligibility requires the assignment of a label to a student's disability, in order to provide specialized services through an IEP. The use of labels to characterize a student with a disability is sometimes thought of as a way to ensure students will be provided the correct type of interventions (Lachlan & Boyle, 2007). It is also necessary to label students to safeguard resources for students with disabilities. But others perceive how a disability label can be stigmatizing to students (Sutcliffe and Simons, 1993; Gillman, Heyman and Swain, 2000).

Throughout the interview process, it was interesting to note that teachers in this study did not explicitly use the label EBD when they referred to their students with behavioral challenges. Teachers' references to students with EBD were implicit, almost hidden. Teachers frequently referred to students as, "students with disabilities," or "students with behavior." When Isabella described the practices she felt were most important with students with EBD, she expressed that she did not actually know whether or not students with behavioral issues in her classroom had the label of EBD. In speaking with me about my question, she responded,

> I know you're looking at students with emotional behavioral disorders, specifically. I haven't necessarily served a lot of students with that specific identification. I don't think it's very common anymore. [I] know that some students might have behavioral

> difficulties, but not have that eligibility. They may have other eligibilities but have some of those (behavioral) issues. Sometimes [I]wouldn't even necessarily know the identification of a student. (Isabella, 2/2/19)

Isabella's comments point to the lack of emphasis she placed on the label of EBD. Teachers in this study more commonly used disability-implicit language by referring to students by first name, or direct reference to the behavior. Behaviors of students with EBD were described independently from the label. The teachers' use of implicit language to reference students with EBD was common throughout this study. As teachers told their stories, it was difficult for me to distinguish the students with EBD from other students with disabilities, in the ways they discussed their practices, insights, and interactions with these children.

***Kids do well if they can.*** Teachers shared the belief that students with EBD want to do well but lack the necessary skills. Throughout the interviews, they often referred to the phrase, or an iteration of the phrase, "All kids do well if they can." Described by Dr. Ross Greene in his book, "The Explosive Child" (1999), it is the underlying belief that students with challenging behavior need skills, rather than will, to change behavior. As a strengths-based approach to working with students with EBD, it is the belief that all students can be successful. Jack discussed how this belief was so much more important than what he did with kids, or what strategy he used.

> I feel like it's so much less of how to do it, and it's so much more, how do you envision your classroom? Number one, every kid wants to do well, every kid wants to be liked, every kid wants to be nice. That's the truth, I mean it, absolutely. If you don't believe that, we've got something to work on. (Jack, 1/15/19).

Jack's statement reveals his strong belief that students with EBD were just like other students, but that they also needed more. It was more than just teaching a skill to a student. It was a firmly-held belief that all students could be successful. Isabella explained that the mantra, "Kids do well if they can," resonated with her. She said it seemed like common sense, an idea that helped her support really demanding kids, who had not been successful in many facets of their previous education.

> Like, no kid wants to not do well, not be a part of their community, or be included or feel successful. Like, every kid wants that. And so, I think that really spoke to me, and I think I've just approached every student with that belief. And so, I would say that's, I guess, my area of expertise. (Isabella, 1/2/19).

The beliefs that Isabella and Jack held about students with EBD and their ability to reach their potential provided a framework for how they viewed and responded to students. Although this was something they admitted was difficult, they continued to persevere with students with EBD, based on that premise.

**Understanding students with EBD.** Helping students with EBD reach success required that teachers understand why students exhibit specific behaviors. Understanding for these teachers was essential to planning for these students and responding to behavior effectively. For them, success meant that their students with EBD interacted with peers in socially appropriate ways, and managed their emotions. Bobbi described what she had learned, how she had changed as a teacher, and how she saw students with EBD through a different lens than she had previously:

> I think it's really solidified in me that...their brains are really different, and they need something different. It's up to us to figure out what they need so that they can be

> successful. Knowing that their behavior is an expression of something of some frustration, it's a communication for them. They're telling us something, and it's up to us to find out. It's not personal, it's just their way of communicating. I've learned that I can't take things like that personal, and it's a big thing for me to learn as a person, as a teacher, as a professional. (Bobbi, 2/2/19).

Bobbi's comments articulate her search for understanding for students with EBD. She believed that understanding helped her and grow as a teacher. Each teacher believed they were constantly learning ways to support students with EBD in the general education classroom, and understanding why a student acted the way he did, or having empathy for uncontrollable circumstances students may have been in, allowed teachers to help these students to aim for success.

**The special education team.** Teachers regarded being a part of a team of professionals pulling to successfully include students with EBD into the classroom as important. These teams were comprised of teachers, special education teachers, and sometimes counselors. The number of special education teachers varied by building, yet the teachers in this study felt highly appreciative of the way teams prevented them from having to make decisions alone. Isabella perceived the special education teachers as spread thin, but all general education teachers had at least one assigned their classrooms, with whom they could consult. Special education teachers worked in the classrooms and provided direct support to students with EBD, as well as modeled behavioral strategies for the classroom teacher. This type of support helped facilitate strong relationships between the general and special education teacher. Teachers perceived the special education teacher as a person they could share ideas with, and someone who really knew the student with EBD.

Because of the specialized training and education special education teachers brought to the team, the teachers viewed them as the experts when working with students with EBD. Together, the team had knowledge of a wide variety of behavioral strategies that were beyond the scope of a general education teachers' training. Bobbi learned specific behavioral strategies and how to integrate them in the classroom from direct support by the special education team. Jack appreciated when the special education teachers could observe students in his classroom and provide coaching and modeling to him and students. Isabella illustrated the importance of the special education teacher in her school by saying,

> They can make that IA schedule, they can consult with the teacher. I think they often are the one to provide the sensory tools or the visual schedule, that accommodation really specific to that student. I see the learning specialist (special education teacher) really kind of holding that role. (Isabella, 2/2/19).

Teachers appreciated the frequent communication they had with the special education teacher. Even when the special education teacher was not available to be in their classroom on a particular day, they appreciated the follow-up communication and check-ins about students.

> If I have a situation at school where it's just not working, where a student is just not getting their work done, I'm in really close connection. We just got a new SPED teacher that I really, really like. She's my case manager for my one student, and we meet every day. She's in my classroom, she knows what I'm doing. We are in constant communication about what curriculum we're covering in math, in writing, in reading, and she knows what's expected. She checks in with me on a regular basis, and we come up with a plan. (Bobbi, 1/2/19).

These data indicate the ways the district emphasized the importance of the relationships between special and general educators. The district prioritized hiring additional special education teachers to support teachers and students inside the general education classroom. Teachers relied on the special education teachers in the building and considered them thought partners and trusted colleagues.

**Teachers' relationships.** Students with EBD often struggle with a connection to school due to their inability to develop and maintain positive relationships with staff and peers. (Kern, 2015). Teachers perceived their relationships with students as foundational to school success. All three teachers shared a common belief that establishing relationships with students with EBD was important. Jack spoke about his belief that developing a caring relationship between two people was what informed his work with students with EBD. He admitted that he did not have a lot of knowledge about EBD, but speculated that relationships were hard for these students. He felt that a strong relationship was essential in helping him understand how students learned. Jack shared one way he developed relationships with his students:

> I think a lot of it is who I am. I like I go to soccer games on the weekend and birthday parties for my students. It's not like you have to become best friends, but like to enjoy each other, to get to know each other, to build that relationship. That is huge. (Jack, 1/15/19).

Jack's sentiment about his relationships with students resonated with me throughout his interviews. I began to believe that his positivity about students with EBD and strong beliefs about their inclusion was not necessarily something he learned or was trained to do; it was at the core of who he was.

Isabella placed importance on the strength of her relationships with students, and believed it held as much importance to academics:

> Essentially, what it boils down to is building a sense of community and also building relationships. Building relationships between the teacher and a student...is super high leverage. Sometimes you don't get to the academics as quickly, and you have to reinvest, reinvest and reinvest, in the relationship. I am a believer that [it's] almost more important. (Isabella, 1/6/19).

Even with the disruptive and aggressive behaviors that students with EBD presented in the classrooms, teachers were open and optimistic about their abilities to develop relationships with these students. Bobbi described the extra effort she puts into these relationships:

> So, I made a home visit. And it was really, really great. In fact, when I did that home visit, that was what helped me get through the rest of the year because, you know, this child was really happy to receive me at home. It solidified my relationship with him, and it helped me understand [him] a little bit more. It helped me ask more questions. It helped me feel like I knew him more. I think it also helped my relationship with the parents because there was just so much going on. It was a pretty intense time. That home visit really helped me. (Bobbi 1/21/19).

Bobbi found home visits an important tool in strengthening her relationships with students, enabling a better connection beyond the classroom and informing her practice. Home visits allowed her to look for different ways she could help a student with EBD access their learning.

Bobbi spent a lot of time during our interviews, accentuating her relationships with students with EBD. It helped her make academic gains with students with EBD. Bobbi smiled

when she told me about how she believed her relationship with a student with EBD helped the student trust her and respond to instruction.

> I developed a relationship with him by asking him to sing his favorite song, and asking him to sing his favorite song in front of the whole class. So, that he was feeling heard. He was getting choice. I was getting to know more about his dad, and I built a relationship with him by asking him more about his father, more about his family...finding out what kind of books he likes to read. And so, he started reading elephant piggy books more and more and more. And he grew as a reader because of that.

When teachers in this study made an intentional effort to develop positive relationships with students with EBD, they saw engagement and success. The relationships these teachers had with students with EBD bolstered their ability to have a positive influence on the outcomes of these students, and in a sense, made supporting these students less difficult.

**Experiences mattered.** Each of the teachers treasured their experiences with students with EBD, and believed it mattered to the success of their classrooms, and their ability to educate all students. Isabella and Jack explicitly stated that the more experiences they had with a student with EBD, the easier it became to help them reach success. Isabella perceived that she had an advantage over some teachers because she had been a special education teacher and gained experience in working with high-needs students.

> I've needed to work with lots of students with behaviors, and so I've had lots of different experiences. But again, I think as we include students more, teachers get those experiences and build that toolbox, they start to feel more comfortable. (Isabella, 2/6/19).

Bobbi articulated how experiences with students with EBD had helped her anticipate behaviors, and be better prepared regarding a particularly challenging student:

> It was like a storm came into our classroom. He was really intense. The level of intensity in the classroom went up. The anxiety went up because he was frustrated or didn't get his way...he would throw the projector across the room, destroy my classroom. That was stressful. What it taught me is that I have to make safety number one. I became much more hyper-aware of really studying him. (Bobbi, 1/2/19).

While Bobbi did not explicitly describe her experiences as helpful, she frequently mentioned how her experiences helped her be more prepared when she had another student with EBD join her classroom the following year. She expressed feeling anxiety about including the student, but to a lesser degree. With a strong belief in creating safe classroom, Bobbi said that her experiences with students with EBD had changed her as a teacher. She believed it helped her become more confident as an advocate for all students.

The more experiences teachers had with including students with EBD in the classroom, the more confident they became in helping students achieve success. Academic success and safety were all outcomes of having experiences with students with EBD, and the more experience a teacher had, the more skilled they perceived themselves to be.

**Administrative Support**

The third theme in the findings is formed around what these teachers considered to be helpful administrative support and what they identified they needed from administration. Successful inclusion of students with EBD is dependent on strong administrative support (Dymond et al., 2008; Fuchs, 2010; M. Smith & K. Smith, 2000), which can be challenging given the complex nature of inclusive schools, and the daily demands teachers and administrators face. The teachers in this study respected the administrative support in their own buildings, as well as district-level support. Their words showed that they admired when principals seemed

connected to the students with EBD, and the classroom. They identified it as vital to their success with students with EBD. In the section that follows, I outline the training teachers found useful, and the trust and advocacy from the principal these teachers experienced. Lastly, I summarize the support teachers articulated they needed from administration.

**Training.** District-wide training was important to these teachers, and helped them reach success with inclusion of students with EBD. Training related to impact of childhood trauma, and de-escalation strategies were of particular usefulness. As someone with less experience, Bobbi cherished the training she received because it helped her learn more about what impacts students with EBD. The training teachers received aligned with the SEL they practiced. They left me with the impression that SSSD had made a focused effort to provide evidence-based practices training, district-wide.

Teachers' different levels of expertise with students with EBD influenced how they perceived types and levels of training. Isabella found it difficult to articulate specific training she had received as a general education teacher, but felt that her previous training as a special education teacher was what helped her achieve success with students with EBD.

> I think because of my experience in special education, there are really specific things that I brought back to the classroom that have helped me. Things like, tracking data, understanding the ABC (antecedent, behavior, consequence) of behavior, even a competing pathway. Those structures that we rely on in special education, have then helped me understand my students and put structures in place for them.
>
> I think if I didn't know that from special education, it would feel a lot more "loosey goosey," or I'd have to rely on someone else to provide those structures. (Isabella, 2/6/19).

Isabella's statement reveals her confidence in the training she received as a special education teacher. Training was something she built on from previous experience, and what she wished more teachers had.

**Trust and advocacy from the principal.** Teachers felt that they were most successful when they had principals who trusted them as professionals, trusted their expertise, and advocated for them. Teachers perceived support that ranged from a principal who purchased supplies or equipment that a teacher needed in the classroom, to being an integral member of their team.

Isabella shared about a time when her principal advocated for her to receive additional paraprofessional support with district-level administration, and obtained it. She was appreciative that the principal knew about what was happening in the classroom and was willing to make the ask:

> The one principal I did have who was a special education teacher for a long time, she was able to give some more purposeful support, at least, some kind of back up. She trusted that what I said was needed, was truly needed. She then, kind of went to bat for me. So, I think that's been the most effective support, is that level of trust and knowing, if something is needed, it must truly be needed. (Isabella, 1/2/19).

Teachers perceived their principals' visibility in the classroom and the relationships their principals cultivated with students with EBD as essential to their own success. Jack remembered a time when his principal helped a student with EBD transition into Jack's classroom during the middle of the school year. With knowledge that the student liked soccer, and a big fan of soccer himself, the principal wore a soccer jersey of the student's favorite player and arranged to be a guest speaker in Jack's classroom. Jack coordinated with the student's mom, and had the student

wear the same jersey. This story stood out for Jack as very important moment, when the student and the principal enjoyed each other, got to know each other, and began to develop a relationship.

Bobbi described how fortunate she was to have a supportive principal. She attributed her ability to be a successful support to her principal's involvement in her classroom. She believed that her principal knew what was happening in the classroom and had an accurate picture of the needs of the classroom. She perceived that she would not have been as successful without her principal by her side. Despite these positive experiences with building administrators, teachers also shared about ways they needed increased support from building and district-level administration.

**Support teachers needed.** Teachers pointed to feelings of frustration and stress when they did not have adequate administrative support. The two key areas of support they desired were enhanced administrative support at the building and district-level. In the following section, I outline the ways in which teachers believed administration could be more supportive. I also discuss how their relationships with building administration, and district-level administration could allow them to successfully include students with EBD in a safe environment. All three teachers indicated the need for an increased level of support, and suggested new ways administrators could assist with their efforts.

***Principal support.*** Teachers acknowledged support from their principals, yet felt it could be improved. Jack referred to times when he had parents call him, upset about a student with disruptive behavior in his classroom, and they wanted more information about the student causing the disruption, and how the school was going to handle it. This was an uncomfortable situation for Jack and he believed that he could not respond to the parent without jeopardizing

the confidentiality of students with EBD. He wanted the principal to call the upset parents, so that he could focus on protecting the students with EBD, while maintaining a positive relationship with the other parents. As I listened to teachers, there was a mutual feeling of frustration for principals who did not take a role in the education of students with EBD, who did not seem to know how to support teachers and students. They wished the principal would take a larger role in supporting students with EBD, rather than simply waiting to respond to disruptive behavior.

> She doesn't have a large role. I think she knows my student. I think principals need to have reports on what's happening with all the students, because the students are really complex. I think in this case; my principal does not know because the student's being successful. So, why should [she] know now? There is going to come a time where, you know, he's not going to be successful or there are going to be problems where she needs to be involved. (Isabella, 1/8/19).

Alongside their accounts of events characterized by aggressive and unsafe behaviors of students with EBD, teachers shared the belief that they needed their principals to advocate for the needs of the teachers and students, by giving them physical resources for the classroom, and going to the district-level administrators to request additional personnel or to advance a student's special education services. Teachers described how administrators' time and support helped their work with students with EBD. They appreciated the ability to collaborate with the principal, but also wished the principal had more knowledge about students with EBD. Each teacher reported infrequent interactions with administration as a challenge to their ability to successfully include students with EBD.

***District-level support.*** There was a common perception amongst teachers that there was a disconnect between the classroom and district-level administration. Some viewed the role of district level administrators to be more focused on bigger ideas, programmatic issues, and the research to support inclusion. However, the teachers perceived that district administrators should also be more involved in the classroom and get to know the students. Bobbi felt that some administrators had been out of classroom for a very long time, and they had forgotten what it was like to be in the classroom. The teachers believed that if district administrators got to know the students with EBD, it would give district administrators more credibility and knowledge about how to support the inclusion of students with EBD. When asked what he wished district administrators understood, Jack said he wanted them to acknowledge that including students with EBD was extremely challenging. Jack imagined how he would validate teachers if he were a principal, and speculated why it might be difficult for some administrators to validate the difficulty of including students with EBD:

> I feel like I would start every teacher workshop with, "You guys are killing it," you know, you guys really have a challenge." "It's a challenge and you guys are working so hard." I think it's easy for administrators to feel like [they] shouldn't say that because, [they] don't know what [teachers] feel like. I could imagine, though, that admitting that this is really hard might come off as, "We made a mistake, that we decided to go this direction [inclusion]."

Jack's statement about how district-level administration might feel about validating teachers' experience points to the idea that teachers believed it was important for administration to be humble with teachers. Jack wanted district-level administration to be open and honest about the

missteps they may have made along the inclusion journey, and how showing their own vulnerability would be well received by teachers.

***Teachers want to be heard and validated.*** Teachers consistently identified the need for their voices to be heard and their work validated by administration. All three teachers felt one way to improve the inclusive model was to give teachers an opportunity to talk openly about their experiences in the classroom. When I listened to teachers, I got the impression that there would be great power in their experiences. This research seemed like one of the first times they had been able to share their stories, leading me to wonder if the district was a safe place for them to be heard. Jack believed that having a forum for teachers to safely tell their story, could improve inclusion for students with EBD.

> I think teachers want to hear someone say, "Let's sit down. Let's figure this out." "It's going to take a lot of extra time, but it's not okay that these things are happening in your classroom," you know. I think that's a big piece that teachers want to hear, is that disruptive and unexpected behavior is understandable, but that doesn't make it acceptable. (Jack, 1/30/19).

Jack's words here convey his belief that teachers should be allowed to disapprove of disruptive behaviors. The opportunity for teachers to be heard could be viewed as an invitation to administration to collaborate and move past points of contention. The teachers articulated the need for teachers who include students with EBD to have their voices heard, not in an adversarial sense, but as a starting point for open dialogue.

> The school district wants to lead with strong beliefs, and sometimes questioning those things, or just being worried that you're going to use jargon, or words that might be

> interpreted as contrary to those beliefs, can be kind of an intimidating feeling. I think sometimes [we] just [need] to be able to speak our minds. (Jack, 1/30/19).

Bobbi also felt it was important for teachers to have an opportunity to speak. She shared her thoughts about this with me during our final interview, saying "we should let teachers tell their story and have administrators hear it… the power of story is huge." (2/2/19).

Isabella expressed how she believed one of the central roles of administration was to listen to teachers who include students with EBD. She considered it a way that the administrators could empower teachers. Isabella explained how her ability to be heard helped her meet the needs of a students with EBD and the needs of her classroom:

> I went to the administrator and said, 'This is not sustainable. I can't keep [my classroom] safe and keep my group going.' I told her I was having to struggle with this daily, and that it didn't work for me to have the classroom disruption. I said, 'That's not meeting his (the student) needs and moving his skills forward, and it's not moving my group forward.' So, I told her, 'we need to do things differently.' (Isabella, 2/6/19).

Teachers affirmed their perception that teaching had become more difficult, which they felt made it imperative to be heard. It was also important for them to be recognized and validated for the hard work they did with students with EBD. Despite all the work this district did to promote inclusion of students with EBD, teachers described including students with EBD in the general education classroom as stressful. They highly regarded the inclusion of students with EBD, yet wanted to be validated for their efforts.

As I spoke with teachers about the support they received, or felt they needed from administration, they spoke openly, but all shared with caution. They were concerned about speaking poorly of administration. Teachers all recognized that, despite feeling positive about the

effort to include students with EBD, truth-telling might jeopardize their relationships with their administrators.

Teachers in this study perceived that administrative support and resources were critical to their success with students with EBD. The building principal's knowledge and willingness to act as a participant in the inclusion of students with EBD was viewed as a necessary component to an inclusive environment. Teachers appreciated and placed a high degree of importance on the training and support the received from the district administration, but longed to have a forum to be heard and validated for their inclusive efforts.

**Advice for Fellow Teachers**

The fourth and final theme in the findings that seemed most relevant are the words participants had for fellow teachers who might struggle including students with EBD. They shared what they thought other teachers who included students with EBD should know, or what they had learned from their experiences. Feelings of stress and frustration were common amongst teachers, and they did not want to be perceived by their colleagues as having all of the answers. Their words described how inclusion of students with EBD was a dynamic process that demanded constant learning and reflection. Self-care was important for teachers, and they revealed the need for self-care when including students with EBD in the general education classroom. By paying attention to and developing their own social emotional skills, they were able to improve their students' learning environment and encouraged others to practice self-care when exposed to disruptive behaviors.

As I spoke with Jack during his last interview, he worried that other teachers might feel guilt for not achieving success with students with EBD. He expressed how he believed teachers feelings of lack of efficacy when working students with EBD, had an influence on their stress

level, and ability to move forward with students. He encouraged teachers not to personalize behaviors in the classroom.

> You know, when you work really hard to get that math workshop perfect, and something goes south really quick, it's hard not to take that personal. We all know that when we take something personally, we're not probably observing our world very logically. I try to remind kids and teachers of that. And, you know, I can wholeheartedly tell any teacher they're doing an awesome job because they really are.

Jack's advice to teachers revealed his belief that the teachers in his school were doing the best job they knew how to do. He spoke sensitively and carefully about his colleagues, and wanted them to have some of the positive experiences he had.

Isabella recognized that having her own positive attitude could be a daily struggle when she included students with EBD. She offered this to teachers:

> It's really hard work. It's supposed to be. Continuing to have faith, and believing in the good is really hard, especially when things are not going well, and you're not seeing growth, and you're not seeing improvement. But, continuing to have that faith will bring you to the other side you, or just choosing to look at what is going well. (Isabella, 2/6/19).

The encouraging words Isabella spoke here reveal how positive an outlook she had about including students with EBD. She conveyed a hope and desire that teachers could reach success with students with EBD.

Bobbi felt that self-care was part of her ability to promote a sense of safety and well-being in her classroom. She said her experiences had led her to confidently express what she knew was important to her own well-being and those of her students. My conversations with

Bobbi around classroom safety suggested her strong belief that teachers should be empowered to make their own decisions based on the classroom's needs. Some of her statements reflected the personal value she placed on protecting students and teachers from harm. Bobbi offered a final thought for other teachers.

> You love each other, you learn together, you go through problems together, but you solve them and you feel- you celebrate together, celebrate your wins, you know, it's a classroom community protected because that's the most important part so that children can learn and grow. (Bobbi, 2/2/19).

Bobbi's words here reflect how she maintained feelings of confidence and affiliation for working with students with EBD. For her, collaboration, problem solving, and success were all achievable in a safe environment.

Each of the teachers expressed unwavering support for other teachers. They recognized the challenges and barriers to including students with EBD, but perceived teachers as being supporters of inclusion and of students with EBD. During my interviews with teachers, they revealed for me the sense of comradery in teaching in inclusive schools, and the value that was placed on working together.

**Summary of the Findings**

Each of the participating teachers had common experiences and perspectives of including students with EBD in the classroom. The interviews I conducted with these teachers yielded an abundance of qualitative data. In this chapter, themes from my data analysis embodied these teachers' experiences including students with EBD in the general education classroom. Throughout the interviews, teachers shared a passion and hope for educating these students. They esteemed social emotional learning practices, believed that all students with EBD were

capable of doing well, and they appreciated the support they received from the principal and special education team. Teachers spoke positively about including students with EBD, yet shared they needed more administrative support. Teachers also offered advice to fellow teachers who include students with EBD. Based on these findings, the following chapter discusses the significance of these findings, implications for practice, and suggests direction for future study.

# Chapter 5: Discussions and Conclusions

This study gave me the opportunity to understand the lived experiences of the three general education teachers who participated in this phenomenological study. These teachers were perceived by administrators as successful at including students with Emotional Behavior Disorder (EBD) into the general education classroom. Using a qualitative method, I examined what practices they found useful with students with EBD, they ways they endeavored for success with these students, and their perceptions of administrative support. I conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews between January 2018 and February 2018. I performed a systematic analysis of the data to further understand teachers' experiences around inclusion.

From a thorough analysis of their experiences, four themes surfaced that illustrate the teachers' commitment to the successful inclusion of students with EBD. The themes are: practices teachers valued, successes, administrative support, and advice for fellow teachers. In this chapter, I review the answers to my research questions by discussing the implications of these teachers' stories.

## Practices Teachers Valued

Similar to the findings of Cook, et al. (2008), the data revealed that, when implemented with fidelity, evidence-based practices have the possibility to improve outcomes for students with EBD. Evidence-based intervention practices in the early years of education are important for students with EBD, and can have positive, life-long effects (Perkins & McLaughlin, 2015). Teachers in this study identified SEL interventions as effective in targeting social skills, leading to improved social and academic growth for students with EBD (Durlak, et al., 2011; Weissberg, Durlak, Domitrovich, & Gullota, 2015;).

Similar to findings revealed in Drugli, et al., 2008, Collaborate Problem Solving (CPS) was an effective, pro-active approach to intervening with students with EBD. Teachers frequently met with individual students, identified a problem together, and collaboratively identified a possible solution. This was significant for a teacher to get a student to invest in the plan. These results extend Stetson and Plog's, (2016) research, where 86% of teachers perceived an improvement in relationships and behaviors of students with EBD when CPS was used.

Self-regulation strategies were also revealed in this study as essential SEL skills that enable students with EBD to regulate their own behavior (Polsgrove & Smith, 2004). Teachers gave careful attention to the emotional climate of the classroom, encouraging them to take breaks as needed to self-regulate. This enabled students with EBD to spend more time on academic tasks and improve their social interactions, confirming findings from Valiente, et al., (2011), which found that children with greater emotional regulation exhibited more pro-social behavior and improved academic achievement.

Creating a classroom community that promotes social aptitude is important for all students, particularly students with EBD (Sreckovic, Shultz, Kenney, & Able, 2018). Teachers in this study viewed this as an effective, responsive approach to meet the needs of students with EBD. Teachers also used the classroom community as a way to manage social dynamics between students, and believed the relationships students had with one another was a way to positively impact behaviors of students with EBD. These findings contribute to existing knowledge by Fredrickson and Turner (2003), which revealed that a community-building intervention had positive impacts on social acceptance of students with EBD by their peers.

Behavior intervention plans and room clears were two other practices teachers named as helpful for supporting students with EBD. When teachers participated in the development of a

behavior intervention plan, they felt more prepared to implement interventions in the classroom. This connects to research indicating teachers implement behavior plans at higher rates when they are directly involved in the planning (Sanetti, Collier-Meek, Long, Byron, & Kratchwill, 2015). The practice of room clears have emerged as the reality of including students with EBD introduces unsafe behaviors into the general education classroom. Teachers perceived the need for safety, corresponding with recent research pointing to increased levels of teacher stress and anxiety in unsafe classrooms (Oregon Education Association, 2019). Not all teachers in this study perceived room clears to be effective. One teacher used them because of her firm commitment to ensuring that students with EBD did not take time away from other students. The experiences teachers shared about their priority for the safety and well-being of all students demonstrated their extraordinary patience and flexibility as teachers.

**Student Success**

Teachers can sometimes feel that achieving success with students with EBD is insurmountable (Clunies-Ross, et al., 2008; Downing, 2007). Contrary to much of the current research, teachers in this study revealed a proclivity for achieving success with students with EBD. They knew what success looked like and recognized the individual needs of these students. A student's sense belonging in the classroom, authentic teacher and peer relationships, acquired social and emotional skills, and academic growth were the key indicators teachers used to measure success of students with EBD.

Teachers' attitudes and beliefs about the inclusion of students with EBD in the general education classroom led to their perceptions of effective outcomes for these students (Hogg & Vaughn, 2010). The idea that poor behavior resulted from a lack of skills, rather than intent, was pivotal, enabling teachers to respond more effectively. This finding lies in contrast to Idol's

(2006) research, where teachers across four elementary schools revealed more negative attitudes about inclusion when they had included students with disruptive behaviors in the classroom. Teachers in this study expressed the importance of maintaining the belief that students with EBD would do well if they could, yet recognized that holding this belief was sometimes difficult, depending on the particular demands a student placed on the classroom (Soodack et al., 1998).

The assignment of a label to a student in special education is common and widely used as a way to identify students (Lachlan & Boyle, 2007). One unanticipated finding of this study was that teachers did not attribute the label of EBD when they shared their experiences with me. Students were described by their behaviors and their names. Teachers' use of implicit language may imply that these teachers were aware of the stigma associated with disability labels (Sutcliffe and Simons, 1993; Gillman, Heyman and Swain, 2000). Another possible explanation for this, is that the inclusive culture this district had built, changed the type of language teachers used to identify students.

A key factor in achieving success is the constant collaboration between general and special educators (Huberman, et al., 2012; Lipsky & Gartner, 1997; Skrtic, et al., 1996). Teachers in this study stressed the importance of having a special education team with which they worked. They told stories about the positive relationships they had with the special educators in the building, and the importance they placed on collaboration and problem-solving specific needs of students with EBD. This contradicts Fuchs', 2010 research where teachers were critical of the support they received from the special education team. Teachers in this study perceived the special educators as teachers they depended on as fundamental to reaching success with students with EBD included in the classroom.

Teachers recognized the importance of experience in serving students with EBD, particularly in how it led to their increased understanding of these students and knowledge of how to support them. These findings were consistent with Allison's (2012) study indicating that teachers with experience had improved their understanding of students with disabilities. Experiences were what informed teachers' practices, and helped them become more confident in working with students with EBD.

**Administrative Support**

Administrative support is essential for successfully including students with EBD into the general education classroom (Fuchs, 2010; Gherke et al., 2014). Teachers in this study contended that administrative support was crucial for the inclusion of students with EBD, and the role of the principal was central to these teachers' success. They valued the building principals who responded to behavioral disruptions and expressed appreciation for those who advocated for them, provided additional resources, and trusted their judgement. Nevertheless, they needed more. Although teachers shared the belief that their district was progressive in its approach for inclusive education, and they valued the district level training and collaboration opportunities if offered, they still felt isolated in their work, and that they were unappreciated. Teachers identified the need to be validated for their efforts of inclusion, and desired an opportunity to collaborate and problem solve with district level administration. They believed this would advance opportunities for their success as a teacher who included a student with EBD.

**Recommendations for Practice**

While this phenomenological study cannot be generalized, if offers new understandings about the nature of including students with externalized behaviors in the general education

classroom. These recommendations suggest ways school systems might provide more intentional support for teachers.

**Implement social emotional learning practices.** Social emotional learning (SEL) practices in the inclusive classroom leads to positive improved social and emotional skills, behavior, and academic functioning for students with EBD (Durlak, et al., 2011). The teachers in this study prioritized SEL for students with EBD and believed these practices taught students pro-social skills, self-regulation, and problem-solving skills. Students with EBD find it difficult to regulate their emotions, navigate social situations, and effectively solve problems (Polsgrove & Smith, 2004). Lack of access to evidence-based behavioral interventions can be a barrier for teachers to successfully implement inclusion, or when SEL practices are not implemented with consistency (Bradley, Doolittle, & Bartolotta, 2008). School districts can remove this barrier by providing teachers the training and support to implement SEL practices. Research has shown that the implementation of SEL practices has resulted in improved behavior and academic progress for students with EBD (Durlak et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2017).

**Provide consistent and visible administrative support.** Districts and schools can provide administrative support by ensuring that building principals are visible in classrooms where students with EBD are included. Having a clear picture of what a teacher is experiencing on a daily basis can help principals identify what resources a teacher may need, or what additional support they need in the classroom to successfully include students with EBD. Consistent visibility and engagement in the team process for students with EBD might also help to establish the principal's trust and credibility with the teaching staff.

**Promote safe and open dialogue with teachers.** District office leadership is often where the vision for inclusion starts. Administrators at the district level should promote a culture of

open dialogue in a safe environment, where teachers who include students with EBD can share their experiences, and feel free from retribution or judgment about their experiences. Such dialogue should be for the purpose to work collaboratively with teachers and administrators, and to find solutions to the challenges these educators experience when including students with EBD. The formation of district-wide professional learning communities, or conducting focus groups, might be a few ways to approach the need for teachers to feel heard.

**Increase collaboration between general and special educators.** Collaboration between general and special educators is critical to the success of inclusion of students with EBD into the general education classroom (Huberman, et al., 2012). It is a way for general education teachers to learn specific strategies and interventions that are effective with students with EBD (Idol, 2006). Coordination between the special education teacher, paraprofessional, and general education teacher could improve the fidelity of interventions for students with EBD. Common collaboration time could include regular, weekly meetings with a focus on student needs, identification of short and long-term goals, and finding solutions to problems that may arise. Collaboration could also include time with the building principal to ensure effective communication about students, classroom needs, and challenges. This time may also serve to help educators better define and understand their roles in supporting inclusion of students with EBD.

**Provide training to ensure classroom safety.** It is important for classrooms to be safe and healthy for learning to occur. Districts can proactively prepare for unsafe behavior and crisis interventions by providing training to general education teachers on evidence-based ways to safely prevent, minimize, and manage behavioral challenges in the classroom. Typically, this training has been provided to special educators who work with students with EBD. But safe

crisis-prevention training is important for general education teachers who include students with EBD because they need effective de-escalation strategies to respond safely to dangerous behavior, while maintaining a student's dignity and preserving their relationship with the teacher. Another way districts could ensure classroom safety is to develop mutually agreeable protocols with teachers that outline how teachers, staff, and the principal will respond to behavior in the classroom. When developing protocols, the district should keep in mind the priority of learning in the classroom, and the health and safety of all students and teachers. Teacher input would be an essential component of the development of protocols.

**Post-secondary education.** Teachers' beliefs are crucial to the success of inclusive education models for students with disabilities (SWD). It is important to shape pre-service teachers' beliefs toward inclusion of SWD within inclusive settings prior to their entrance into the teaching field. Post-secondary institutions can recruit and develop pre-service teachers who have positive beliefs about the inclusion of SWD by surveying candidates about their beliefs, or embedding related questions within an interview phase. For pre-service teachers who have positive beliefs about inclusion, an institution could support these students to develop problem-solving and decision-making skills within inclusion contexts through student teaching opportunities. Partnering with local school districts to align inclusive vision, practice, and education would be a vital part of recruiting and retaining pre-service teachers who believe in inclusion.

**Recommendations for Future Study**

Additional study that includes the voices and experiences of a larger group of general education teachers who include students with EBD in the classroom, across different grade levels may be helpful at exploring the research questions in more depth. Obtaining a more

comprehensive view of the experiences of general education teachers, administrators, and special education staff could uncover commonalities and variations across educational roles held in education. Additionally, research that would explore perceptions and experiences of general education teachers who are not perceived as successful, could provide comparisons between teachers, and might allow for a deeper understanding of the broader picture of issues related to inclusion of students with EBD in schools. These insights could open up more dialogue to help support teachers successfully include students with EBD.

**Contributions to the Research**

This research contributes to the field's knowledge regarding the successful inclusion of students with EBD in the general education classroom and general education teachers' experiences. There is a growing body of research regarding the inclusion of students with EBD in the general education classroom, and the complex issues that districts and teachers face (Beam & Mueller, 2017; Kauffman & Hallahan, 2018; Oregon Education Association, 2019; Westling, 2017). Yet, there is still a need for educators to understand what evidence-based practices are effective, valuable, and useful when including students with EBD.

The field contains a large body of quantitative research focused on the attitudes, beliefs, and needs of teachers who include students with EBD (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000; Bender, Vail, & Scott, 1995; MacFarlane & Wilson, 2013). The results of these studies are mixed. The teachers in this study contradict many of the beliefs that teachers hold about the inclusion of students with EBD, and offer new perspectives on what it is like to successfully include these students. In fact, recent research from the Oregon Education Association (2019) provides many parallels to the findings of this study. With increased attention on the challenges

that face educators in Oregon who include students with EBD, the teachers in this study offer new viewpoints and insights on how to efficaciously include students with EBD.

**Limitations**

One of the contextual difficulties of examining research like this in small, identifiable districts is the social networks that exist and the close political ties between leadership and teachers. It can be difficult to is balance the integrity of the information participants provide and the need to protect their identity. A researcher must make the choice to exclude meaningful findings in order to reduce risks to the participants. I walked this line carefully, in consultation with my chair and trusted colleagues.

In hindsight, one limitation of this research study was its narrow focus on teachers who successfully include students with EBD. This meant I could not build a more comprehensive picture of what it is like to build a successful model of inclusion across a variety of teachers' beliefs and attitudes. The quality of teachers being committed to inclusion was what drove the data, along with teachers who were viewed by others as successful. As I reflected on this research process, I wondered what the results of this study would have been had I interviewed teachers who struggled with this inclusion work. Much of the information teachers provided gave me hope, yet I also wondered if there was more to the story that I was missing. If I could do this study again, I would sample a wider range of teachers, and include more teachers who had experiences with students with EBD. I believe this would have provided more depth to this study, and offered a broader view of the issue at hand.

**Reflections and Insights**

As an administrator, I learned how important it is for teachers to be heard and to have opportunity to share their experiences. As a student-centered educator, this experience has

humbled me and re-focused my efforts to support the health and well-being of teachers who include students with EBD. I always recognized how challenging their work was, but I did not yet know how to facilitate a discussion about what they needed. As a new researcher, I believe I have gained some knowledge and skills that I can utilize in my own leadership. This research has given me the empathy and will shape some of the things I will do in my own district as I go forward.

I have considered myself to be an advocate for inclusion for students with disabilities. However, after hearing the experiences of these teachers, I have learned that using research alone as a way to defend inclusion is not the full answer for bringing about successful inclusion. Rather than taking a defensive position, administrators need to focus on listening and learning from teachers' experiences. If we do not find a way to successfully include students with EBD, we may continue to see high dropout rates and poor life outcomes for these students, which will continue to negatively impact our communities. Teachers who are committed to the inclusion of students with EBD are an inspiration for educators to improve and increase inclusion for such students.

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# Appendix A

## Key Informant Recruitment Letter

**Key Informant Recruitment Letter**

Dear Administrator,

My name is Kimberley Shearer, and I am a student in the Doctor of Educational Leadership program at George Fox University in Newberg, Oregon. I am also a director of student services in a district in Oregon. As a requirement of my program, I will be conducting research and have chosen to examine the lived experiences of general educators who include students with Emotional Behavior Disorders (EBD) in the regular classroom. I hope that the findings of this research offer insight into the experiences of general educators working with students with EBD, along with successful practices, challenges and barriers, and what kind of support is needed for educators.

I would like to invite you to be a key informant of my study. Key informants are knowledgeable about the study's setting, have insight about potential participants and context, and understand the purpose of the questions being examined. Because of your role and expertise in the district, I am asking for your help in identifying potential participants.

I am seeking participant teachers who teach first, second, third, or fourth grade in a general education classroom. Additionally, these teachers should have a student with EBD included in their classroom at least two or more hours per day. They should be teachers whom you perceive as successful working with these students. Criteria for "successful" should include teachers who you perceive to have implemented successful behavioral strategies, have positive relationships with students with EBD, and have demonstrated academic growth for these students.

It will be important that you hold any information you offer me in confidence, in order to comply with IRB requirements to assure participants' confidentiality. Also, I will not confirm with you which teachers end up participating in the study, for this reason.

Thank you for your time in considering this project. If you agree to participate in this study as a Key Informant, please confirm with me by responding to this email. If you agree to be a Key Informant, you will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement.

If you have any questions regarding this research, please contact me at kshearer16@georgefox.edu (503) 310-0930, or my advisor at George Fox University, Dr. Susanna Thornhill, at sthornhill@georgefox.edu.

Sincerely,

Kimberley Shearer

# Appendix B

## Key Informant Confidentiality Agreement

**Key Informant Confidentiality Agreement**

Title of Study: Including Students with Emotional Disturbance: Teachers' Experiences

Researcher: Kimberley Shearer

Key Informant: _____

Thank you for agreeing to be a key informant of my study. As a key informant of this study you may have access to confidential information about study sites and possible participants. It will be important that you hold any information you offer me in confidence, in order to comply with IRB requirements to assure participants' confidentiality. Also, I will not confirm with you which teachers end up participating in the study, for this reason.

- By signing this statement, you are indicating your understanding of your responsibilities to maintain confidentiality and agree to the following:

- The names and any other identifying information about study sites and teachers you identify as possible participants are completely confidential.

- Agree not to divulge, publish, or otherwise make known to unauthorized persons or to the public any information obtained in the course of this study that could identify the persons you identified as possible participants.

- Understand that you should not read information about study sites or possible participants, nor ask questions of teachers you identify for your own personal information.

- Agree to notify the researcher immediately should you become aware of an actual breach of confidentiality or a situation which could potentially result in a breach, whether this be on your part or on the part of another person.

| _____ | _____ | _____ |
|---|---|---|
| [Name of Key Informant] | Signature | Date |

# Appendix C

## Letter of Consent for Participating Teachers

**Letter of Consent for Participating Teachers**

A Phenomenological Study on Elementary General Education Teachers' Experiences with Students with EBD Included in the Classroom

Dear Educator,

My name is Kimberley Shearer, and I am a student in the Doctor of Educational Leadership program at George Fox University in Newberg, Oregon. I am also a director of student services in a district in Oregon. As a requirement of my program, I will be conducting research and have chosen to examine the lived experiences of general educators who include students with Emotional Behavior Disorders (EBD) in the regular classroom.

Details of the study
You are invited to engage in three 90-minute interviews regarding your experiences with students with EBD included in your classroom. The questions are open-ended and relate to your background and your experiences with students with EBD in the classroom. I hope that the findings of my interviews reveal insight into the experiences of general educators working with students with EBD, successful practices, challenges and barriers, and what kind of support is needed for educators. In order to be fully present during the interview, and to ensure I know what was actually said, I will digitally record the interviews. These recordings will later be transcribed.

Benefits
I hope the findings of my interviews will help me understand the experience of general education teachers who include students with EBD in the regular classroom, and how they contribute to students' success in school. Participants' identities will be held in confidence in this study. While the personal identities of the teachers will be concealed, your voice and personal experiences will be shared as a way for educators and administrators to hear first-hand how teachers have contributed to the success of students with EBD in school.

Compensation
For participating in this study, you will receive a $25 Amazon gift card.

Confidentiality
Your identity will be protected in the study. I will use pseudonyms (fake names) to maintain confidentiality in the writing of any results of this study. You will be given the opportunity to choose your own pseudonym as the name will appear in the study. I will work with you to modify any identifying details that could be used to identify you.

The Key Informants who provided participants' names for this study may have an idea of your identity, but will not receive confirmation of your participation. The Key Informant will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement and will be asked not to speak to any potential participant. Your identity will be stored in a secure location that I only have access to. The specific location of your school, district, or city will not be disclosed in the study.

All research materials (i.e., audio-recordings, transcriptions, and signed consent forms) will be locked in separate, secure locations for a period of no less than three years. I will be the only individual who will have access to these materials. After three years, I will personally destroy all relevant materials and delete the audio recordings.

Risks
Some of the interview questions may be personal in nature, and could cause emotional discomfort. Please be aware that your participation is completely voluntary and you may decline to continue at any time or decline to answer any question at your discretion.

Arranging Interviews/Location
The interviews can be conducted at a place of your choosing. The location of the one-on-one interviews will be a safe, public place like the library, the school, the school district office, or your home. You will receive a copy of the interview questions ahead of the interview, but may be asked additional follow up questions.

Member Checks
You will have an advanced opportunity to review a final narrative memo of the analyzed data. During the final interview, I will ask you if (a) if I had accurately portrayed your experiences, (b) if the memo gave justice to your experiences, and (c) if you have any comments, objections, or additional details to provide. Additional, more personalized questions may be added based on data analyzed after the two interviews. If you note any errors or misinterpretations I will adjust the narrative to reflect changes, incorporating your comments and feedback into the formation of the final narrative.

Use of Study
The results of this study will be used for my research and dissertation as part of my study with George Fox University. If you would like a copy of the final result, I would be happy to share a copy with you upon its completion.

Thank you for your time in considering this project. If you have any questions regarding this research, please contact me at kshearer16@georgefox.edu (503) 310-0930, or my advisor at George Fox University, Dr. Susanna Thornhill, at sthornhill@georgefox.edu.

If you understand the use of this research, please sign below.

Consent
If you agree to participate in this study, please sign your name next to the following items:

Name: _____
Signature: _____ Date: _____

I agree to be digitally recorded:
Name: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

# Appendix D

## Interview Questions

## Interview Questions

Interview One Questions: Professional History

1. How long have you taught?
2. How long have you worked in the district?
3. Do you consider yourself to have an area of expertise? If yes, tell me about that.
4. Were you in the district when it transitioned to a full inclusion model? If yes, can you describe how that process unfolded?
5. How do you personally define inclusion (for students with disabilities)?
6. Have you received any education or professional development in the area of educating students with Emotional Disturbance?
7. What instructional practices do you value and support for students with EBD?
8. Describe what administrative support you have received for including students with EBD?
9. What kind of support and resources do you feel you need?

Interview Two Questions: Details of Experience:

1. Describe your experiences with inclusion in your district.
2. Can you share a story (or two) with me about what it's like to include a student with EBD in your classroom?
3. What behavioral strategies do you find most helpful and why?
4. How would you define success for students with EBD in your classroom?
5. How you do you help students with EBD reach success? Can you share a time when you felt you achieved success with a student with EBD?
6. Describe challenges you have faced when including students with EBD. How do you try and overcome these challenges?

Interview Three Questions: Meaning of Experience:

1. Have any insights or stories arisen for you since our last conversation? If so, would you share them with me?

2. Given your experiences with students with EBD you have reconstructed for me in past interviews, what does inclusion of these students mean for you?

3. As you have described your challenges with students with EBD, in what ways have you changed as a teacher?

4. You described how you reach success with students with EBD. How do you understand success for these students?

5. What do you wish your administrator/district leaders understood about your experiences?

6. What has felt most meaningful to you with regards to participating in this study? Anything else you'd like to share with me?

# Appendix E

## Member Checking Procedures

## Member Checking Procedures

1. After the final interview, I provided the participants with a final analytic memo that articulated the data I gathered and analyzed from the series of interviews for each participant.

2. At the end of the memo, three questions were posed for the participant to reflect on and respond to by email or phone:

    1. Did I accurately portray your experiences?
    2. Did the narrative memo give justice to your experiences?
    3. Do you have any comments, objections, or additional details to provide?

3. If there were any errors, misinterpretations, or any additional details expressed by the participants, I adjusted the narrative to reflect changes, and incorporated participants' comments and feedback into the formation of the final narrative.

# Appendix F

## Analytic Memo Example

# Analytic Memo Example

## Analytic Memo
**Bobbi**
**1/29/19**

**Teacher introduction:**

Bobbi began her teaching career in an urban district in Oregon. She spent two years teaching in a private school before making a transition back to the public-school setting for the last six years. Bobbi currently teaches a first-grade-second-grade blend in a suburban school district. Bobbi commutes to work from a large urban area, but mentioned that she felt the district she works in has a lot of resources for teachers, making her long commute tolerable.

Bobbi has a passion for teaching reading and writing, and identified this as her area of expertise. She stated that she has gotten better at classroom management and building community. Bobbi considered herself lucky to have only 24 students in her classroom, and couldn't remember a time when her district did not practice inclusion. Bobbi includes one student with EBD in her classroom and has had at least one student with EBD in her classroom for the last three years. Bobbi defined inclusion as the participation of students in her school and classroom, regardless of the way a student looks, acts, or talks.

Bobbi is a strong advocate for support for teachers and students when including students with EBD. She believes that the landscape of teaching has changed and that teachers are faced with more challenges, sometimes leading she and other teachers to feel "demoralized." Bobbi believes that the "growing pressures" on children and families is making it more complex to be a teacher. With these complex issues, Bobbi stated that she feels lucky to work in a school that helps her keep a safe, classroom community of learners.

**Question:** *What are the instructional and behavioral practices that teachers' value and support?*

1. **Routines and Rituals helped students learn expectations and normalize social skills.**

Bobbi shared stories about the different ways in which she built community through a variety of rituals and routines. Bobbi had a personal way to structure the community. Bobbi described the regular morning meetings her class had where students would sit in a circle, have a snack, and share something that they did over the weekend. Bobbi established expectations for the day during classroom meetings by reviewing a daily schedule with the students. Bobbi explained that classroom meetings were important to keep communication "clear" yet "positive." Bobbi shared that at times she would have impromptu classroom meetings to process with students after disruptive behavior had occurred in the classroom. She felt that "allowing children to express" fear or anxiety helped to re-establish a sense of safety in the classroom. The classroom meeting was a way Bobbi affirmed to students that "we're all here to learn and we all are doing school the best we can."

2. **Teacher and student relationships led to understanding, acceptance, and learning.**

Bobbi emphasized the importance of building a classroom community and how it helped peers in the classroom accept and help students with EBD learn.

> Johnny (pseudonym) is learning how to do school and they know that. It's really great because the other kids might help Johnny. Because we built that classroom community, everybody accepts Johnny for who is, but they also try to help him. When he's not safe, he gets escorted out. As soon as he is back in the green zone, he's back in the game with everyone else. (Bobbi, 1/21/19).

Bobbi believed that the relationships students with EBD have with their peers is important. Bobbi said that there is a "connection and they see each other more as equals..." Each teacher shared an example of what they believed to be an authentic and mutually beneficial relationship between a student with EBD and a peer in the classroom. Bobbi illustrated how the students in her classroom had gotten to know a student with EBD through classroom community, and how kids understood and "know him."

> You know, in fact, it's really great because the other kids might help Johnny. Sometimes, if he's frustrated about something, maybe an app isn't working right, he's frustrated with a math page, or he doesn't want to do his handwriting, sometimes kids will come in and say, "Hey, it's okay, Johnny, you can do this." They're really great. They're really supportive of him. (Bobbi 1/29/19).

Bobbi illustrated a personal relationship she had with a student with EBD and how important establishing relationships were. Bobbi remembered a time when she had a student with very "violent" behaviors who would curse, destroy things, and dominate classroom time. Bobbi reflected on the behaviors of this student and decided to visit the student's home to "make more connection."

> So, I made a home visit. And it was really, really great. In fact, when I did that home visit that was what helped me get through the rest of the year because, you know, this child was really happy to receive me at home. It sort of solidified my relationship with him, and it helped me understand a little bit more. (Bobbi 1/21/19).

Bobbi described how she developed relationships with students with EBD. She took a genuine interest in their lives, their families, and their talents. Bobbi felt that in order to develop a relationship with students with EBD, she had to allow them "to be heard. "Bobbie asked students about their lives, both inside and outside of the classroom. In turn, Bobbi shared things about her own life to students. She smiled widely when she shared that she had written songs with one student and invited him to sing his favorite song to the class. With excitement in her voice, Bobbi recalled a time when building a relationship helped a student with EBD learn to read.

> I was getting to know more about his dad, and I built a relationship with him by asking more about his father, more about his family, and finding out what kinds of books he liked to read. And so, he started reading Elephant and Piggie books more, and more, and more. He grew as a reader because of that. (Bobbi, 1/29/19).

# Appendix G

## Institutional Review Board Approval

# Institutional Review Board Approval

**GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY HSRC INITIAL REVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE** **Page 6**

Title: Including Students with Emotional Disturbance: Teachers' Experiences

Principal Researcher(s): Kimberley Shearer

Date application completed: 11/15/18

**(The researcher needs to complete the above information on this page)**

**COMMITTEE FINDING:** For Committee Use Only

☑ (1) The proposed research makes adequate provision for safeguarding the health and dignity of the subjects and is therefore approved.

☐ (2) Due to the assessment of risk being questionable or being subject to change, the research must be periodically reviewed by the **HSRC** on a basis throughout the course of the research or until otherwise notified. This requires resubmission of this form, with updated information, for each periodic review.

☐ (3) The proposed research evidences some unnecessary risk to participants and therefore must be revised to remedy the following specific area(s) on non-compliance:

☐ (4) The proposed research contains serious and potentially damaging risks to subjects and is therefore not approved.

Chair or designated member

11/20/18

Date