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An Examination of the Suspensions of Students Identified with a Learning Disability

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Walden University
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Abstract

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by

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MA, Walden University, 2012

BS, University of Maryland, 1999

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Students' disruptive behaviors in the inclusive classroom that are detrimental to the

learning environment can eventually elicit exclusionary consequences from general and

special education teachers. The recent implementation of the Positive Behavioral

Interventions and Supports (PBIS) in the local school district has behavioral outcomes for

the students identified as learning disabled. The purpose of this study was to gather and

examine information regarding the implementation of PBIS and how the application

supports local students identified with a learning disability (LD) receiving excessive

suspensions due to their disruptive behavior. This study was guided by Skinner's theory

of operant conditioning and Ross' behavioral opportunities for social skills theory. The

research questions addressed the teachers' and administrators' perspectives on identified

practices in place, which positively affect learning in the inclusive classroom. A

purposeful sample of 2 principals, 3 special education teachers, and 5 general education

teachers who had knowledge of the students with behaviors detrimental to the learning

environment, volunteered and participated in interviews. The data were coded into

themes relating to disruptive behaviors, PBIS, classroom management, and functional

behaviors and assessments. Results indicated aspects of applied evidence-based practices

to support students identified as LD in the inclusive class. The findings provided in this

study might help administrators make informed decisions to assist general and special

education teachers with supporting the students in the inclusive classrooms. The potential

for positive social change may be influenced by establishing professional learning

communities and mentoring programs that may decrease the number of students with

disruptive behaviors.

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Section 1: The Problem

The Local Problem

The problem to be investigated through this study was whether the

disproportionate numbers of suspensions for students identified as learning disabled (LD)

were impacted by the recent implementation of the positive behavioral interventions and

supports (PBIS). The disproportionate amount of suspensions is problematic across the

country when students with LD account for 11% of the population but 20% of all

suspensions (Brobbey, 2017, p. 216; Leone, Mighter, Malmgren, & Meisel, 2000, p.14;

Monahan, VanDerhei, Bechtold, & Cauffmann, 2014; United States Department of

Education, Office of Civil Rights (USDOE), OCR, 2014). McNeill, Friedman, and

Chavez (2016) reported the suspension of students with LDs leads to negative

impressions with social and academic interactions, thus increasing the probability of

these students dropping out of school. There is a focus on developing alternatives to

suspension by introducing school-wide PBIS to assist with challenging behaviors

(Sharkey & Fenning, 2012). PBIS is a program meant to provide safe and healthy

positive learning environments for all students (Office of Special Education Program

(OSEP) Technical Assistance Center, 2016). The local southern school district in this

study has recently implemented PBIS to address the suspensions of students with LD (F.

G. Wilson, personal communication, July 31, 2017).

The special education director expressed concern about the number of

suspensions that may be connected to the lack of general and special education teacher

training on different approaches to classroom management (F. G. Wilson, personal

communication, July 31, 2017). The teachers' framework for teaching and how they respond to students' behavior continues to be a topic of discussion with the USDOE and the local school district (Park & Lynch, 2014; Yudin, 2014). Researchers have associated a reduction in office discipline referrals (ODR) with classroom evidence-based strategies and behavior interventions (Gavoni, Edmonds, Kennedy, & Gollery, 2017; Park & Lynch, 2014; Yudin, 2014). The special education director pointed out a pattern for students identified as LD receiving a disproportionate number of suspensions due to their disruptive behavior when compared to their non-disabled peers (F. G. Wilson, personal communication, July 31, 2017). Although the special education director communicated a need for further review of data about the disproportionate number of suspensions for students of a LD, success with defining this problem has not been well researched.

Rationale

The rationale for this qualitative project study was to examine the perceptions of general and special education teachers and administrators, including the special education director and the assistant principal, to gain more in-depth information regarding local students identified as LD receiving a disproportionate number of suspensions due to their disruptive behavior and whether the recent implementation of the PBIS has behavioral outcomes that influence students with a LD. Interview questions were used to gather individuals' perceptions of the different challenges with the implementation of the PBIS and the current methods of classroom management used when teaching students with a LD. A qualitative study that gathers data related to Skinner's (1938) reinforcement theory of operant conditioning may help with understanding teachers' and administrators'

perceptions. The results from this study may be used to identify what was being done to address the behaviors of students identified as LD, as well as improve training and support for the general and special education teachers.

In August of 2018, the local school district initiated an action plan to implement PBIS for all grade levels in the local school district (F. G. Wilson, personal communication, August 2018). A recent drive to provide high-quality instruction while maintaining a safe and healthy learning environment has directed the integration of a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) (Lane, Carter, Jenkins, Dwiggins, & Germer, 2015). In a study on supporting comprehensive, integrated preventive tiered models, Lane et al. (2015) highlighted the benefits for the evidence-based PBIS. The PBIS model has been known to meet students' social and behavioral needs while promoting academic growth (Flannery, Fenning, Kato, & McIntosh, 2014; Lane, Carter, Jenkins, Dwiggins, & Germer, 2015; Oram, Owens, & Maras, 2016). Identifying reinforcement which is given after a behavior that elicits the desired behavior may support Skinner's (1938) model of operant conditioning for changing undesirable or disruptive behaviors. Exploring teachers' and administrators' perceptions of elementary school students' social and behavioral needs in the general education inclusive classroom may support the development of this project study.

Definition of Terms

The research on teachers' perceptions and student engagement includes certain key terms. The following terms and their definitions were used in this study:

Behavior: Behavior is what the student is doing or what is observed by another person teacher (Skinner, 1938).

Classroom settings: are the instructional settings that provide structure to improve student achievement (Gavoni et al., 2017).

Evidence-based practices: Evidence-based interventions are grounded in more than one available research, have been effective, and are rigorously tested (APA Presidential Task Force on Evidence-Based Practice, 2006; McIntosh & Goodman, 2016).

Expulsion: A disciplinary action by the school district that permanently removes a student from his or her learning environment for an extended time (Steinburg & Lacoe, 2017).

Inclusive classroom: Inclusive is a term that expresses commitment to educate each child, to the maximum extent appropriate, in the school and classroom he or she would otherwise attend. It involves bringing the support services to the child (rather than moving the child to the services), and requires only that the child will benefit from being in the class (rather than having to keep up with the other students).

In-school suspension: An in-school suspension is an instance in which a student is temporarily removed from his or her regular classroom for at least half a day but remains under the direct supervision of school personnel (USDOEOCR, 2014).

Out-of-school suspension: An out-of-school suspension takes place when a student is temporarily removed from his/her regular school for disciplinary purposes to another setting (e.g., home, behavior center). This action includes both removals in

which no IEP services are provided because the removal is 10 days or less, as well as

removals in which the child continues to receive services according to his/her IEP

(USDOEOCR, 2014).

Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS): PBIS is a school-wide

systematic approach to establish a positive learning environment and climate for all

students. PBIS is a method used to develop some school-wide behaviors that are

expected and rewarded when the students' exhibit taught behaviors (McIntosh &

Goodman, 2016). PBIS reform guides the school's social culture and providing intensive

behavior supports, such as functional behavioral assessments, identifying contexts where

behaviors occur, and teaching communication, social, and self-management skills

(Steinburg & Lacoe, 2017, pp. 50-51).

Significance of the Study

This qualitative study is significant in that it may provide data that can be

examined to analyze general and special education teachers' perceptions about the recent

implementation of the PBIS and the problem with students identified as LD receiving a

disproportionate number of suspensions. This study is also significant because the local

special services director is monitoring the recent implementation of the PBIS and is

seeking possible solutions for the number of office referrals that have resulted in

suspensions (F. G. Wilson, personal communication, July 31, 2017). The findings may

identify a gap in training or practice of teachers related to the recent implementation of

the PBIS. The results of this study might be used to categorize an action plan with

training and coaching to support the recent implementation of PBIS to help local

participants decrease the rate of suspensions for students identified with a LD (Hemmeter, Hardy, Schnitz, Adams, & Kinder, 2015; Reinke et al. 2014). Hemmeter et al. (2015) established the benefits of training and coaching for supporting teachers in the use of evidence-based instructional practices. Data gathered regarding the general and special education teachers' and administrators' perceptions about the problem with students identified as LD receiving a disproportionate number of suspensions, the implementation of the PBIS, and the behavior management systems in the classroom could provide the information needed to establish a project study addressing training.

This qualitative project study examined the gap in practice with local students identified as LD receiving a disproportionate number of suspensions. I used data to inform a project study that could address the recently implemented PBIS and the use of reinforcement procedures and preventive punishment strategies (i.e., suspension) (see Gerow, Davis, Radhakrishnan, Gregori, & River, 2018; Ross, 2015). This project is unique because the questions asked to the general and special education teachers and administrators addressed a problem with a disproportionate number of suspensions at a local elementary school. The outcome from the examination of classroom teachers has led to the need for a professional development system to address the deficit in effectiveness with behavioral management support for students (Brobbey, 2017; Hemphill, Plenty, Herrenkohl, Toumbourou, & Catalano, 2014; Wanzek, Al Otaiba, & Petscher, 2014). The results of this study may open a dialogue about the recently implemented PBIS and provide training for teachers in the inclusive classroom. The interview responses have produced a clearer understanding of the problem from

perceptions derived from the general and special education teachers and administrators. This project study can be shared with all local participants to improve elementary teachers' classroom behavior management, subsequently decreasing the rate of suspensions for students with LD.

Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative study is to interview the general and special education teachers and administrators, including the special education director and the assistant principal, regarding the disproportionate number of suspensions due to the disruptive behavior of local students identified as LD. Open-ended interview questions were used to gather responses to the research questions, using nonverbal communication (emails). This study addressed the following research questions:

Q1: What do the general and special education teachers feel are the reasons for the high rate of suspensions for students identified as LD at the local school setting?

Q2: What do the administrators, including the special education director and the assistant principal, feel are the reasons for the high rate of suspensions for students identified as LD at the local school setting?

Q3: How do general and special education teachers implement the PBIS model and methods in classroom management in the inclusive setting?

The special services director expressed the need for further understanding of the causes of out-of-school suspensions and what is needed to decrease the out-of-school suspensions for students identified with a LD (F. G. Wilson, personal communication, July 31, 2017). An understanding of teachers' and administrators' knowledge and

perceptions of behavior interventions in the inclusive classroom might help the local elementary school participants make informed instructional decisions about the recently implemented PBIS, the methods in classroom management, and the disproportionate number of suspensions for students with a LD. Hacieminoğlu (2014) identified the importance of teachers' perceptions and instructional practices, as the knowledge of daily practices might impact and affect the characteristics of the classroom behaviors while affecting the teachers' classroom practices. By conducting interviews with the teachers and administrators regarding perceptions of the recent implementation of the PBIS, the methods in classroom management, and the disproportionate number of suspensions for students with a LD due to disruptive behavior at the local elementary school, the southeastern school district may gain a deeper understanding of the needs in professional development (PD). The efforts from the project study might help to improve the disparity for this group of students who have a disproportionate number of suspensions.

Review of the Literature

The literature review section presents a foundation for the study by providing a review of past research literature on the topic. The sources were located through relevant peer-reviewed articles, online databases, research books, and other related articles which were obtained using Google Scholar, ERIC, Education Resource Starters, Education Complete, ProQuest, Sage Premier, and other education sources. The key search terms used were *special education, implementation of the PBIS, behavior in the inclusive classroom, inclusive education, and behavior management models in the inclusive classroom*. The presiding theme that was found based on the data was the past use of the

PBIS sheet. Teachers spoke of PBIS in the past tense and as a nonexistent intervention. The participants discussed various levels of preventive punishment strategies in place for all students in their school. There was a leading theme with rewards as a positive intervention. The data review led to the following themes in literature: disruptive behaviors, PBIS, classroom management, and functional behaviors and assessments (FBA). A review of the literature indicated there is minimal research on the gap in practice of general and special education teachers and administrators related to the effects of the recent implementation of the PBIS, the methods in classroom management, and the disproportionate number of suspensions for students with a LD due to disruptive behavior in elementary schools.

Conceptual Framework

Positive social exchanges take place in the classroom that is managed with evidence-based practices (Ross, 2015). The first conceptual framework that supported the qualitative study is explained using Ross' framework to become a BOSS (behavioral opportunities for social skills) teacher (Ross, 2015). Ross' (2015) evidenced-based step-by-step practices are designed to help teachers with the effective management of discipline problems that have reached crisis proportions. The BOSS teacher can work effectively with the various behaviors in the inclusive classroom. Upon becoming a BOSS teacher, the educator demonstrates the skillset to understand the science of child development, motivation, psychology, and the typology of children's behavioral responses (Ross, 2015). According to Ross, an educator's focus needs to be on creating and sustaining new practices to transform the learning process. The basic ingredients for

establishing the foundation for the learning environment are modeling the target

behavior, allowing time for practice, and increasing the positive feedback about the

process (Ross, 2015). When teaching students with LD, Mercer, Mercer, and Pullen

(2011) agreed that positive feedback increases motivation to continue a skill with

accuracy. This qualitative study was grounded using both Ross and Skinner's (1938)

theories, since each theory supports the understanding of behaviors.

The second framework that supported this qualitative study is explained using

Skinner's operant conditioning which ensured credibility, transferability, dependability,

and confirmability of findings (Charmaz, 2010). Skinner's (1938) operant conditioning

theory continues to be one of the most classic approaches used by the behaviorist to

explain the complexities of human behavior. Outcomes from the interviews were

compared to Skinner's theory (1938) of operant conditioning, which identifies three types

of responses to behaviors (McLeod, 2015). The three operant conditioning responses

outlined by McLeod (2015) are neutral operant, reinforcers, and punishers. In the review

of operant conditioning, Skinner (1938, 1953) demonstrated how positive reinforcement

and changes to the environment worked to strengthen positive reactions to expected

behaviors while removing unpleasant experiences (McLeod, 2015).

Similar to the BOSS teachings, Skinner's (1938) operant conditioning usually

depends on the environmental conditions and positive reinforcements. Two concepts that

support the plausibility of the implementation of PBIS are operant conditioning and

BOSS. Both theories support the fundamentals of PBIS, which addresses the behaviors

of students and is based on sustained positive reinforcement. The implemented model for

PBIS leads to a common practice that promotes students being rewarded for doing what the teacher expects (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016). Questions were asked about PBIS, other evidence-based practices, behavior management strategies, and social interactions to ground data collection and analysis to answer research questions.

Review of the Broader Problem

There are clear guidelines given to educators about the types of support offered when responding to a student identified with a LD exhibiting disruptive behaviors in the inclusive classroom. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (U.S. Department of Education, 2016), is the legislation that outlines the process to protect students with a LD. The framework of the law ensures the protection for students with a LD by safeguarding the provision of a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) for these students. In the description of our nation's progress to support students identified with a LD, the 38th Annual Report to Congress provides school settings with the procedures to maintain each student in the least restrictive environment (LRE) (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). The FAPE measures the outcomes relating to students' absences from school, including those exclusionary absences caused by suspensions. The legal process identifies procedures for students with a LD who are suspended from school for more than 10 school days in a given school year.

When a student identified with a LD receives excessive suspensions, the process requires an administrative team of knowledgeable individuals from the local district, to including the parent, to review information and documentation relevant to the student's program and disability (e.g., IEP) and its relationship to the recommendation for

suspension. The team conducts a manifestation determination to determine the relationship between the student's disability and the behavior causing trends for exclusionary discipline. The topic of discussion in the collaborative forum may include nonviolent behaviors and behaviors similar to their general education peers. Topics may include poor academic achievement, minor behavioral problems, poor interpersonal skills, attendance problems, and lack of family support (Knudsen & Bethune, 2018). The team examines the student's IEP and behaviors to generate changes that support behavioral needs and academic goals.

History of Evidence Based Practices and Interventions

In addition to the legislation relating to IDEA, the USDOE, OCR, and the Department of Justice (DOJ) are working together to support school discipline. In 2011, the DOE and DOJ launched the Supportive School Discipline Initiative to organize the federal effort to support state and local challenges to improve school climate and discipline. In January 2014, the DOE released a source with informational materials designed to support state and local efforts (Steinburg & Lacoe, 2017). Steinburg and Lacoe's, (2017) report based on this reform highlighted 23 of the nation's 100 largest school districts that have implemented a policy requiring nonpunitive discipline strategies that limit suspensions. Based on policy relating to Pub. L. No 108-446, the consideration concerning the case-by-case determination a student's academic future requires action governed by professionals and parents/guardians (Fowler, Hulett, & Kieff, 2011). While the law allows for discretionary uses of exclusionary discipline, Fowler et al. (2011)

cautioned the stakeholders that repeated suspensions of short durations can be discouraging for the student and hinders educational practices.

Operant Conditioning Used for Behavioral Management

Skinner offered teachers and administrators this question: How could a person anticipate and hence prepare for what another person would do (1974, p. 10)? The basic concept of student behavior and classroom behavioral management interventions relates to Skinners' operant conditioning, as there is a relationship between overt events in the environment and changes in specific behaviors (Skinner, 1974; Zirpoli, 2008). Skinner built on Thorndike's (1905) philosophy of hedonism, in which people act to achieve pleasure and escape from or avoid pain. Proposing the theory to show positive reinforcement, Skinner's theory of operant conditioning supports a change in behavior based on the use of reinforcements.

The BOSS Classroom

In a recent publication, Ross (2015) created the framework for a teaching program with effective interventions that offer behavioral opportunities for social skills (BOSS) (Ross, 2015). Ross' evidenced-based step-by-step practices on how to treat students is designed to help educators with preventing the discipline problems that have reached crisis proportions. The BOSS teaching program encourages behavioral analysis techniques that promote positive reinforcement of age-appropriate social skills through modeling while limiting opportunities for inappropriate behaviors (Ross & Sliger, 2015). Students identified as LD in the inclusive classroom respond to culturally positive opportunities, which support diverse learners. All students can be empowered

intellectually, emotionally, and socially when they are taught skills and behaviors that stimulate cultural referents (Ford et al., 2014).

Long (2016) noted the effectiveness of the BOSS teaching program as it reduces the challenging behaviors for students in the classroom setting. The BOSS socially responsive pedagogy offers strategies to best support the students in the well managed inclusive classroom. The implementation of the well-managed classroom with a BOSS teacher is committed to:

• Ignoring nuisance behavior

•Resisting being reactive to inappropriate behavior

•Pointing out the desirable behaviors

•Making a big deal of or celebrated desirable behaviors

•Using the BOSS language 25% or more during the overall communication with students

•Following the four steps for implementation BOSS (Ross, 2015, p. 114).

Ross' (2015) (BOSS) teaching program provides positives reinforcements for prosocial behaviors in school settings.

Inclusive Classroom

The list of attempts to integrate students identified with a LD is varied. Public schools have a history of reluctance with moving students with extensive support needs into general education classrooms (Choi, Meisenheimer, McCart, & Sailor, 2017; McLeskey, Landers, Williamson, & Hoppey, 2012; O'Rourke, 2015; Ryndak, Jackson, & White, 2013). The factors that contributed to the changing classroom model throughout

special education includes legislation, litigation, parent advocacy, the outcomes of research, funds, and resources, as well as training and program development (Florian, 2014). It was the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) policies that propagated the drive to move students identified with a LD back into the general education classroom. The inclusive model presents challenges for the teacher giving direct instruction. There continue to be inconsistencies in how teachers implement the inclusion for students with a LD (Ford, Stuart, & Vakil, 2014, p. 59; Gehrke, Cocchiarella, Harris, & Puckett, 2014). In the longitudinal plan, characteristics of an inclusive learning environment promote success for students identified as LD.

The learning environment that uses the inclusive model offers lessons that are differentiated according to students' needs. Burden (2010) outlined a management plan to help with the development of the supportive and caring inclusive classroom. In the inclusive classroom that is built on caring and supportive learning, the teacher does the following: celebrates diversity with actions that recognize each student's contribution; believes all students can be successful while setting a standard of high expectations for each individual; encourages all students with words of praise, reinforcement, and guiding suggestions; responds enthusiastically with welcoming, warm positive reactions, and shows students a caring learning environment (Burden 2010, p. 166). In the inclusive classroom, an action plan for teaching, the management systems in place, and the types of interventions used can support the behavioral needs for students. Separately, each type of involvement can be directly related to the change in the students' behavior.

Implementation of the PBIS Model

PBIS is a "systems approach," aimed at each schools' social culture and it also provides intensive behavior supports, such as: functional behavioral assessments, identifying contexts where behaviors occur, and teaching communication, social, and self-management skills (Steinburg & Lacoe, 2017, pp. 50-51). The implementation of the PBIS to address problem behaviors has been effective (Flannery, Fenning, Kato, & McIntosh, 2014; Lane, Carter, Jenkins, Dwiggins, & Germer, 2015; Oram, Owens, & Maras, 2016). In the three-year study, high school students were examined after the introduction of the PBIS. The researchers monitored the change in high school students' problem behaviors. Before this research, the evaluation of the outcomes of the implementation of the PBIS for high school students was limited. In addition to Flannery et al. (2014), Muscott, Mann, and Lebrun (2008) examined the outcomes relating to students' achievement after a school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports (SWPBIS). In the early stages, evaluations of high school students' problem behavior improvement were documented through data derived from SWPBIS (Muscott et al., 2008).

Elementary and middle school setting implementation of the PBIS has been documented as a model that enhances schools' academic achievement and classroom climate while reducing referrals leading to suspensions (Horner, Sugai, & Anderson, 2010). SWPBIS is currently implemented in more than 23,000 schools nationally and internationally (Gage, Whitford, & Katsiyannis, 2018, p.143; PBIS). There is growing evidence that the SWPBIS has a positive effect on students' behaviors (Childs, Kincaid,

Peshak, George, & Gage, 2016; Horner et al., 2010) and academic performance (Gage, Leite, Childs, & Kincaid, 2017). Algozzine et al.'s (2012) study was conducted in the Southeastern region using demographic features of schools and participants with comparable characteristics to the local school district. The schools had a high number of students on free or reduced lunch, the ethnicity included a majority African American, with a significant number of Hispanic students, and the Caucasian students were the minority. (Algozzine et al., 2012, p. 43). The trend in the research revealed validity with the success of the implementation of the PBIS model. The SWPBIS was evidenced by the participant's readiness for change and willingness to "buy-in" (Algozzine et al., 2012, p. 60). An emphasis on the implementation with fidelity of the school-wide Behavior Instruction in the Total School (BITS) appeared to have enhanced schools' academic achievement classroom climate, while reducing referrals leading to suspensions for the student identified with disruptive behaviors (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016, p.41; Reddy et al., 2019). Schools that need a change in behaviors can offer teachers and teams of professionals within each school the comprehensive, evidence-based classroom intervention training.

Classroom Environments

Teams of professionals within each school that use comprehensive, evidence-based classroom interventions have seen positive change for the student identified with disruptive behaviors (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016, p.41; Reddy et al., 2019; Ross, & Sliger, 2015). The working relationship between classroom general and special education teachers, based on progress monitoring using data-driven assessments in the

school setting, can promote improvement with students' disruptive behaviors that might prevent academic learning (Eagle, Dowd-Eagle, Snyder, & Holtzman, 2015). In a recent study, Eagle et al., (2015) highlighted the collaborative efforts between school psychologists and administrators to promote a systematic change by using cognitive behavioral strategies with students in the inclusive classroom. Using the consultation and collaboration model, the school psychologist provides continuous knowledge with proficiency in curricular and instructional methods for problem-solving strategies and evidence-based intervention (Eagle et al., 2015). The educational leaders' routines in the collaborative model are significant during the regularly scheduled problem blocking and solving meetings (Avant & Swerdlik, 2016). During the collaborative meeting, discussion related to leadership involvement, data analysis, progress monitoring, and activity changes offer support to the general and special education teachers in the inclusive classroom. In addition to knowledge of interventions practices, administrative leadership fosters the organizational and environmental support for effective implementation of evidence-based practices such as PBIS, which are confirmed to produce positive change for the student with disruptive behaviors (Eagle et al., 2015).

The history relating to students' positive classroom behavior, which is communicated by the willingness to demonstrate academic confidence, shows that performance in the classroom is related to the teacher's connection with the child; a positive connection may have the effect of encouraging the student to work harder and cope more (Anderman & Anderman, 1999; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Wentzel, 1998). Furrer and Skinner's (2003) analysis of the regression in students' behavior and

classroom engagement revealed the relationship between teachers' contributions and the effects of perceived control. The teacher identifies with the students' ability to follow instructions as a strength when communicating positive behaviors in the classroom (Park & Lynch, 2014). In the early childhood classroom, not following teachers' instructions can be a common barrier to effective classroom achievement (Park & Lynch, 2014; Rodriguez, Thompson, & Baynham, 2010; Wilder, Allison, Nicholson, Abellon, & Saulnier, 2010). Park and Lynch (2014) focused on early intervention in the preschool classroom because developing positive classroom behavior early on can help prevent serious disruptive behaviors during later school years.

Students with a Learning Disability

In general, specific LD is defined in the IDEA as "a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write or to do mathematical calculations" (Oklahoma State Department of Education (nd.). Students identified with a LD are often divergent learners. The Department of Education identifies divergence as challenges that may include "difficulty reading out loud, poor reading comprehension, struggling to write papers and essays, trouble understanding, lectures, and difficulty holding a pencil" (Special Education Guide, 2019). According to the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY), specific LDs "commonly affect skills in the areas of reading (called dyslexia), writing (called dysgraphia), listening, speaking, reasoning, math (called dyscalculia)." In 2008, almost 1 million children (ages 6 through 21 years) had some form of a LD and received special

education in school (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Those numbers have gone down from 42.9% of the students ages 6 through 21 years served as students with a LD in 2008 to 38.6% of the students ages 6 through 21 years served as students with a LD in 2016 served under part B of IDEA. The part B of IDEA governs how special education and related services are provided to school-aged children with disabilities.

Implications

The research of studies cited in the literature review suggests there are evidence-based interventions that could assist a student with disruptive behaviors in the inclusive classroom. The findings from this study may provide general and special education teachers and administrators with the tools needed to advance students' academic achievement while reducing disruptive behaviors of students identified with a LD. Research has identified evidence-based interventions to assist students with disruptive behaviors and professional learning regiments for supporting and teaching (Eagle, et al., 2015; Horner, Sugai, & Anderson, 2010; Park & Lynch, 2014). The guidelines for evidence-based interventions to assist learning suggest four basic principles to support PBIS implementation: using data to narrow expectations, establishing goals and objectives, adapting practices and interventions, and organizing recourses to maintain opportunities (Sugai & Horner, 2009).

During deliberation by the local school district in the fall of 2017 leadership meeting, district-wide data were reported: students with LD represented 9.2% of the school population and accounted for 26.7% out-of-school suspensions. When compared to their general education peers in the local school district, this data demonstrates a

disproportionate number of total suspensions for students identified as LD. Additional

research is needed to determine the reoffense rate. The special services director's report

identified out of school suspension by disability. The report indicated the students

identified with a LD had the most behavioral referrals which led to out-of-school

suspensions (F. G. Wilson, personal communication, July 31, 2017). In the general

education classroom, the general and the special education teachers are expected to

implement evidence-based interventions to prevent and address these students' behaviors

(Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015; Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA],

2004).

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

Educators continue to debate the best practices for supporting a student identified

with a LD. Special education services for students identified with a LD vary because all

children are unique. Pullen (2016) described the professionals' role in the field of LD as

the teacher or administrator that must continue to research best practices for

identification, supports, and interventions. Educators need to demand excellence in the

field and advocate for students identified with LDs to ensure that they have an

opportunity for success in school and life (Pullen, 2016).

Further research is needed to focus on critical elements of government reforms,

classroom learning environments, and implications of policies affecting suspensions and

exclusionary practices used in the public school setting. A look at the future for

improvements to support students identified as LD includes a look at disciplinary

programs and policies that allow for the trends with exclusionary practices and a variety

of alternatives, with the endorsement of federal and state governments (Steinburg &

Lacoe, 2017). This investigation of the implementation of evidence-based classroom

practices may provide general and special education teachers and administrators some

common problem behaviors to avoid.

Section 2: The Methodology

Qualitative Research Design and Approach

The purpose of this basic qualitative research study was to examine the perceptions of general and special education teachers and administrators, including the special education director and the assistant principal. The research may offer information regarding whether the disproportionate numbers of suspensions for students identified as LD were impacted by the recent implementation of the PBIS. A qualitative approach can be used to capture diverse characteristics of the teachers' approaches to classroom management systems in place and develop themes based on the various characteristics (Creswell, 2012). Depending on the purpose of research, expectations of the participants and audience may vary. The goal of this basic qualitative study is grounded in research with a plan for helping others (Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Walcott, 2009).

Description of Qualitative Research Design

The approach of this qualitative research study is to collect data via interviews. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), the basic qualitative approach was used to bridge theory and concepts by using interview questions and data collection methods. The examination of the perceptions of 10 general and special education teachers and administrators, including the special education director and the assistant principal, might offer results for an analysis which may be used to understand the problem with students with LD getting suspended due to disruptive behavior (Aldosari, 2016). Merriam and Tisdell (2015) suggested the use of interviews as a source to analyze the special administrators' perceptions about students' behaviors in the classroom (Aldosari, 2016).

The online interviews are often advantageous to transcribe due to the direct quotes from interviewees.

Responses from interview questions provided perceptions of the general and special education teachers and administrators about students' problem behaviors. These perceptions might be used to develop approaches for effective classroom management in the inclusive classroom (Abma & Stake, 2014). Online interviews were transcribed after the participants gave consent. Data from interview questions were coded for evidence-based classroom management systems in place. Open coding was used to answer the research questions by carefully examining and comparing parts of data (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell, 2018; Saldana, 2016). The data from the qualitative project study may be used to establish training or professional development in the local school district. Training or professional development could address evidence-based collaborative approaches for effective classroom management styles and support an understanding of the students in the classroom (An & Meaney, 2015; Fallon, Collier-Meek, Maggin, Sanetti, & Johnson, (2015); Fettig & Artman-Meeker, 2016; Shabani, 2016; Wong et al., 2014). The basic qualitative design led to a project study that offers teachers professional development.

Justification of Research Design

A basic qualitative design is an effective strategy to collect narrative data about the social phenomenon of teachers in the inclusive classroom setting. Yin (2014) suggested the use of a qualitative research study when examining the life experiences of participants in real-world conditions. This basic qualitative study used viewpoints and feelings from participants about the students identified as LD receiving suspensions in the

local elementary school. The purpose of this study is to examine general and special education teachers' and administrators' perceptions of approaches to classroom management systems in place.

Other kinds of studies, such as case study design, ethnographic designs, grounded theory, narrative designs, and phenomenological research, were not selected because of the extended expectation for engagement in the field and the methods of the data collection (Charmaz, 2014; Gentles et al., 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Merriam and Tisdell (2015) discussed the basic qualitative research study as the most common type of qualitative study found in education. The goal of conducting this study using the basic research inquiry without it being a particular type of qualitative research is motivated by the intellectual desire to extend knowledge of a phenomenon. In contrast to the quantitative research that uses numbers for data analysis, this basic qualitative study used words as the primary source of data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

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Participants

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Selecting Participants

A selection of teachers and administrators who have been purposefully sampled guaranteed the research achieved specific criteria (Creswell, 2012). The criteria for this study was certified special education teachers, certified general education teachers who teach students identified with a LD in the inclusive classroom at a southeastern rural elementary school, and administrators who support the general and special education teachers in the inclusive classroom at a southeastern rural elementary school. This study was a tool to gain purposeful sampling as an evaluation of the participant perceptions of

the disruptive behaviors that lead to suspensions for students identified with a LD.

Aligning with Ravitch and Carl's (2016) conceptual framework for research, the major

role for this study was to identify, examine, and understand the general and special

education teachers' and administrators' social location, positionality, and their

manifestation and impact on classrooms in the local southeastern rural school (Ravitch &

Carl, 2016, p.45).

Justification of Number of Participants

The setting for this research study was a rural public elementary school in a

southeastern state. When conducting this study, evidence was collected during

interviews to examine the teachers' perceptions of the school's characteristics, climate,

culture, management systems in place, and other factors that may relate to student's

disruptive behaviors and the administrative decisions that may lead to suspension of

students identified as LD. Purposeful sampling was used to select the participants,

because purposeful sampling of general and special education teachers and administrators

allows for an in-depth focus on the phenomenon in the local elementary school

(Burkholder, Cox, & Crawford, 2016). Purposeful sampling assists with the research

success in the selection of specific criteria (Creswell, 2012). The criteria for this study

was general and special education teachers who work in an inclusive classroom and

administrators who were contacted to provide training, coaching, and support to the

teacher who might work in the inclusive classroom with students identified with a LD.

Burkholder et al.'s (2016) explanation of trustworthiness in a qualitative study is based

on relevance, rather than availability. The purposeful sampling of teachers and

administrators was based on the research and interview questions relating to the local

problem of students with disabilities being suspended at disproportionate rates

(Schwandt, 2015).

Access Researcher-Participants Relationship

The procedure for obtaining access to conduct the local project study, which

requires connecting with participants, begins with obtaining permission. When

developing the plan for the study in the local setting, seeking permission is a first step in

the qualitative research process. The superintendent gave informal permission, as he was

interested in one of his staff members pursuing a doctorate in special education. Using

Creswell's (2012) format for a letter requesting consent, the email to the superintendent

included the purpose of the study, the rights to ask to obtain data about student

suspensions, and the results from the study's (Creswell, 2012).

The submission of the proposal to Walden University Instructional Review Board

(IRB) for approval to collect data is a requirement of the research process. After

obtaining approval, I received permission from the school's principal at the research site.

The application process required the approval of the school district's IRB committee and

the school principal. The letters from the local school were given to Walden as required,

and the approval from both schools' IRB provided the final endorsement to conduct the

study. Once endorsed by Walden's IRB, the quest for eligible participants teaching at the

research site took place.

Participants were notified about my role in the study by email. The email

introduced me and gave a brief overview of the problem, purpose, and research questions.

The participants were informed of the expectation of a voluntary study. The consent

form had a clause attached with an option to stop participating in the study at any time

(Glesne, 2011; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The general and special education teachers and

administrators were informed about the structure of the interviews, which included

expectations for time (approximately 60 minutes). Finally, the participants were notified

of the importance of confidentiality, including a clause with a guarantee that the

principals or administrators would not receive any of the raw data (i.e., transcripts from

the interviews).

Target Population

The setting for the qualitative study is a rural public school in a southeastern state.

The target sample population was purposefully sampled. Purposeful sampling guarantees

the researcher selects participants who fulfill a certain criterion (Creswell, 2012; Merriam

& Tisdell, 2015; Patton, 2015). The purposeful sampling in this study is based on the

assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight, and

therefore must select a target population (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The process of

qualitative research attempts to explore a phenomenon of a group in their natural setting

in ways that are contextualized according to the individuals' experiences (Patton 2015;

Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The public elementary school consists of students in grades four

through six with 100% of the population of students receiving free breakfast and lunch

through the School Breakfast Programs and National School Lunch Program. The

selected Title I elementary school averages approximately 650 students per school year.

The student count for the inclusive classroom at the elementary school averages 20

students to one teacher. For this study, I selected eight elementary school teachers and two administrators supporting the elementary school. I explored the perceptions of the participants who support and teach in an inclusive classroom.

In determining the criteria for this study, I focused on (a) general education teachers who have students identified as LD in the inclusive classroom, (b) special education teachers who have students identified as LD in the inclusive classroom (c) general and special education teachers who offered the inclusive classroom to students with LD at a southeastern, rural elementary school, and (d) administrators that support the general and special education teachers who offered the inclusive classroom to students with LD at a southeastern, rural elementary school. General and special education teachers were the ideal participants for this study because they work with students identified as LD who were in the inclusive classroom and were suspended due to disruptive behavior. There may be an exclusion of teachers in the elementary school because they may not provide direct classroom instruction to students identified as LD. Keeping with Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), who described a particular group being studied as "a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context" (p.28), this qualitative study attempts to describe the local elementary school's bounded unit (Burkholder et al., 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The bounded system in place for this study was the rural elementary school's inclusive classroom for students identified with a LD.

Sample Method and Size

In a qualitative study, the sampling size often depends upon the topic being researched, the availability of participants, usefulness, and credibility. Schwandt's (2015) explanation of sample strategies relies on two critical issues, the logical and the purposeful. Patton's (2002) outline for sampling includes no exact rule for selecting a sample size in a qualitative inquiry. Researchers have recommended setting a numerical target when using purposeful strategies for sampling (Burkholder et al., 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Patton, 2002; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The goal is to answer the research questions, to achieve an understanding of the local students identified as LD receiving a disproportionate number of suspensions due to their disruptive behavior by using purposeful investigation, and to determine if the recent implementation of the PBIS impacted those behaviors. Since having a minimal number of participants may allow for concentration of exploration of this research problem, eight general and special education teachers were the proposed sample size. Two administrators who support the general and special education teachers in the local elementary school were asked to assist with the exploration of the research questions

Protecting Participants Right

Walden University's action plan to ensure student readiness involves academic course instruction securing the protection of participants in a research study. In February 2019, I completed the Basic Course from the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) program for human subjects' protection. The course outlined the history, risks, and ethical principles to assist with the process of interacting with

participants. The content of the course provided knowledge on how to obtain informed consent while respecting the participants' privacy and confidentiality. The general and special education teachers and administrators in the research were treated with respect. Each participant had an opportunity to read and discuss a description of the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Ravitch and Carl's (2016) plan to protect the rights of participants includes a clause in the consent form allowing participation, refusal to participate, or withdrawal at any time. The goal was to help the participants feel comfortable with the interview process and throughout this study.

Confidentiality

In qualitative research design, ensuring ethical discretion of participants is important to protect them from harm. Numbers or aliases were used instead of names to protect the confidentiality of the participants (Creswell, 2012). All participants were treated with respect. The participants were informed of all procedures and expectations, as outlined by the institutional review board (IRB). All notes about the participant and research information were maintained and kept in a safe and secure place. If ethical issues arose during the study, data collection and analysis only took place with participants' approval. Information was not shared between participants without consent. Ravitch and Carl (2016) recommended rehearsing the informed consent process, the structure of the study, and confidentiality procedures multiple times to ensure consistency with disclosure of expectations before interviews. Participants were given assurance that "data was treated ethically in terms of confidentiality and anonymity as well as respect for how participants are portrayed" (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 458).

Informed Consent

Informed consent is a process that has various stages. As a part of Walden University's guidelines to gain access to participants, I sent an email to the district's superintendent with the outline of the purpose of the qualitative study. The email asked for his approval to conduct a project study in the local community. While completing Form A to obtain preliminary ethics feedback from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), I contacted the local school district's internal review specialist. Working with the district's internal review specialist, we concluded that no internal IRB research approval system were required (personal communication, September 4, 2019). After gaining University Research Reviewer (URR) approval, I sent the formal consent letters by email to the school administrators and met face to face to explain the purpose of the study. All formal consents were obtained electronically. The emailed letter of cooperation was used to gain access to potential participants and data collection.

Protection from Harm

There are ethical considerations the researcher should take to protect the participants from harm. Formal approval is a specific consideration to provide each participant information before their involvement with the research (Yin, 2018). Informed consent gave the participant detailed information about the study. Participants' volunteerism to participate and knowledge of the study were protective measures for this qualitative study. I avoided methods that might have led to deception while implementing safeguard strategies to ensure confidentiality and privacy to all participants. A precaution included was the IRB's approval of the study before

participant selection. Walden University's requirement to complete the Collaborative

Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) program offered specific details about assessing

the risks, obtaining informed consent, and maintaining privacy to protect participants

from harm. The proof of completion is submitted as a part of the proposal process.

Data Collection

Description of Data Collection

The purpose of data collection was to gain information about the perceptions of

the principal and special and general education teachers in the local elementary school.

Interview questions focused on the local students identified as LD receiving a

disproportionate number of suspensions due to their disruptive behavior and whether the

recent implementation of the PBIS has behavioral outcomes that influence students with a

LD. Data collection addressed three research questions. The interview questions focused

on gathering responses to the research questions, using written communication (emails).

Once IRB permitted data collection, I started contacting participants by going to the

research site. I found fifteen eligible participants, to gain consent for this study. Ten of

the 15 participants completed the three documents requested for sufficient data collection.

Justification for Data Collection

Interviews were used to gather the most accurate responses from the teachers and

administrators. "How" and "why" questions were asked in this basic study as a strategy

to close perceived gaps and provide a better understanding of concerns (Yin, 2014). The

foundation for this study was to gain information on the thoughts of teachers and

administrators concerning students with LD being suspended at disproportionate rates.

Keeping with Ravitch and Carl's (2016) concepts for positionality, this qualitative

research offered the opportunity for participants with a shared educational association the

choice of location, dates, and times of the interviews. The teachers and administrators

were given adequate time to share knowledge and experiences about the inclusive

classroom in the local elementary school. This study took place in the participants'

hometown and school to ensure the epistemological assumption of this research

(Creswell, 2012; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This experience offered the participants an

opportunity to reflect on the study's research questions, and the responses derived from

the teachers' and administrators' perceptions of the disproportionate number of

suspensions due to disruptive behavior at the local elementary school.

Instruments and Sources Interview

Qualitative research studies have shared qualitative data collection methods, such

as analysis of documentation or artifacts, focus groups, interviews, and observations

(Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This study employed the basic qualitative approach to

explore the interventions in the inclusive classroom of the local elementary school.

Merriam and Tisdell (2015) described the basic qualitative study as the "most common

type of qualitative study found in education" (p. 12). The motivation driving this

research was an interest in the phenomenon in the local school district where students

identified with a LD are being suspended at disproportionate rates. Merriam and Tisdell

identified the benefits of interviews within the basic study because its interpretation can

eventually inform the educational practice or a phenomenon.

Interview Protocol

A foundation of a qualitative study relies on interview instruments, also called interview protocols (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p.215). I obtained permission to use the interview protocol (see Appendix B). This study employed the interview protocol to explore the perspectives of general and special education teachers related to the approaches to classroom management and how it is being used to support students identified with a LD. This qualitative study used an interview protocol to structure and record themes from interviews with multiple sources. The interview protocol included a list of questions (see Appendix B). I collected data through one-on-one teacher interviews with each teacher and administrator. There were three central guiding questions and 12 open-ended subquestions.

Reputability of Sources

To strengthen the validity and reliability of this study, I used the triangulation method of gathering data (Miles et al., 2014). Creswell (2012) and Lambert (2012) suggest using more than one source to enhance the information gathered. The plan to interview general education teachers who teach students identified as LD in the inclusive classroom, special education teachers who teach students identified as LD in the inclusive classroom, and administrators that support the general and special education teachers offered this research the triangulation necessary to draw a range of information to answer the research questions (Lambert, 2012). The emphasis on anonymity and confidentiality helped safeguard participants' probability of giving honest answers to interview questions (Lambert, 2012).

Sufficiency of Data Collection Source

Although research relies on different kinds of documentation that could exist in a study, this qualitative study classified data themes using the natural context from multiple sources (Lodico et al., 2010; Patton, 2015). As suggested in research, this documentation led to a discussion of the naturally occurring phenomenon that transpired in the research context (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In this research context, there were five general education teachers and three special education teachers who teach in inclusive classrooms with students identified as LD (Lambert, 2012). This study focused on a sufficient number of participants in the field of education, who shared their personal experiences in the classroom setting at the local elementary school.

Processes of Data Collection

Purposeful sampling was the tool chosen for selecting participants in this study. The participants were interviewed one-on-one and asked to complete a demographic data sheet. The participant criteria for this qualitative study included two administrators and eight general and special education teachers who provide behavioral support to students identified as LD, who are served in an inclusive classroom. A letter with information applying to this study was emailed and hand-delivered to the box of each teacher who met the criteria. This letter provided information about the study and its purpose. Next, the teachers that were willing to participate met after school. During this meeting, the participant received a flyer and was given the opportunity to ask questions before being interviewed. Each participant signed the interview sign-up sheet and gave their personal email and phone number. I used the member checking strategy, which allowed each

participant the opportunity to read an outline of the transcript to check for accuracy of the

interview and the findings. Member checks (also referred to as participant validation) is

a strategy to "check in" with participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016 p.4). Teachers and

administrators were given an opportunity to challenge and interpret the study during the

member checking. None of the 10 participants challenged the interpretation of their

interview.

Systems of Tracking Data Collection

A number was assigned to each participant's interview to assist with the system of

tracking and confidentiality. I read each interview protocol within 24 hours of each

interview, because a quick turnover in data helps to maintain accuracy (Spring, 2012). A

record of the conversation provides an opportunity to discover information that cannot be

observed and to explore novel interpretations of what is seen (Glesne, 2011). During the

study, all documentation was saved on a password-protected flash drive with the

identifying information deleted. After completing the research, the documents were

placed in a locked safe for five years to maintain confidentiality.

Gaining Access to Participants

Gaining access to participants involves obtaining consent at various levels.

Purposeful sampling was the tool chosen for selecting participants in this study. The

participants were interviewed one-on-one and asked to complete a demographic data

sheet. The participants' criteria for this qualitative study included two administrators and

eight general and special education teachers who provide behavioral support to students

identified as LD, who are served in an inclusive classroom. A flyer with highlights of the

study was shared at the local elementary school. A letter with information explaining the purpose of the study was emailed and hand-delivered to each teacher who met the criteria. The letter provided information about the study and its purpose and disclosed how the information would be used. The teachers that were willing to participate received an email with the letter of consent. There was an interview sign-up sheet with various times available before and after school to accommodate teachers' schedules. After each interview, I used the member checking strategy, which allowed each participant the opportunity to read the transcript to check for accuracy of the interview and the findings. Member checks (also referred to as participant validation) is a strategy to "check-in" with participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016 p.4). Teachers and administrators were given various opportunities to challenge or interpret the study during this process. Throughout the process of gaining access and interviewing participants, I was available by email or phone and for face to face conversations.

Role of the Researcher

I am a third-grade special education teacher attempting to improve my role as educational support for my students, school, and community. I do not work in the school where the research took place. I do not have a supervisory role with the participants. Strategies of triangulation and the member checking process helped limit personal bias (Creswell, 2012). Data collection from the participants did not present an issue.

Data Analysis

Data were collected from individual interviews. Rubin and Rubin's (2012) description of data analysis refers to the process of moving raw data received from an

interview to clear and convincing answers to the research questions. This study was organized by a phenomenological analysis of data, which is an "open" coding process to identify categories and themes (Saldana, 2016). First, I identified pertinent data that needed to be collected relating to research questions. The request to the Department of Education cataloged the local district's number of suspensions per school year for the three grade levels. The break down was by grade levels and disability for the past five years. Then I developed interview questions to address the research questions. After interviews were completed, the interviews were organized and filed by participant number. Next, the password-protected interview files were saved twice, on the computer hard drive and backed up on an external flash drive. Finally, data was coded by patterns and trends that emerged from the data collected, based on the topics in the literature reviewed for this study that are related to the perception of the local students identified as LD receiving a disproportionate number of suspensions due to their disruptive behavior. Throughout the data analysis process, phenomenological interpretations of the themes and meaning of the text were checked and rechecked (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Evidence of Quality

There are procedures to ensure quality in Walden University's requirement to facilitate a University Research Reviewer (URR) process. The first step to ensure completion of the doctoral capstone involved the support of the committee members and the URR. The URR's quality assurance mechanism has been in place since January of 2009. The URR process prompts continuity and quality control in the capstone by ensuring collaboration is regulated with checklist development. The checklist was used

to assist with the planning for data collection and analysis, which was done with fidelity. Planning for data collection ensures quality and evidence-based techniques during the research process. Upon completing the investigation, procedures to safeguard ethical aspects were addressed.

The Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and approved methods for data analysis prior to collecting data. IRB's approval for participant recruitment and consent was reviewed and addressed in the completion of IRB form A. IRB form A emphasized the need to obtain appropriate approval for the data collection procedures, consent form, or site agreement. Participants' right to withdraw from the study, potential risks and benefits, confidentiality, and the consent were areas of importance during the planning stages and communication with IRB. The planning stages of the capstone emphasized the need for the researcher's role pertaining to reliability, and validity, study's design, and findings.

Discrepant Cases

During the data collection and data analysis stages, there were methods for identification of discrepant cases conducted for the transferability, dependability, conformability, and credibility of this study (Maxwell, 2013). When attempting to achieve rigor or mitigate threats to validity, the researcher should apply strategies such as triangulation and members checking (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Ravitch and Carl (2016) recommend using multiple sources of investigation and participant validation strategies to help with achieving validity. Direct attention was given to discrepant data to support the credibility and dependability of this study. As themes were identified, the 10

participants' perspectives were included to ensure findings were accurate, realistic, and valid (Maxwell, 2013). The data analysis process included reporting all results from the findings that may or may not involve discrepant cases. Keeping with Creswell's (2012) depiction of a qualitative study, this research was conducted with accuracy based on the findings by offering a detailed description of a local phenomenon, triangulation, member checking, and presenting discrepant information. Although discrepant data were annotated and documented, it was not a primary contributor to the outcome of this study.

Limitations

The selected criteria for this study was based on the local problem of students identified as LD receiving a disproportionate number of suspensions due to their disruptive behavior. Though the criteria are clear and defined, there are limitations that come with the discussion. The results may be affected by the individual participants. The limitations may be affected by the role, experience, or positionality and/or social identities of the participant selection (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The goal of this qualitative research was to use purposeful sampling, which may affect the sample size. The limitation of the number of inclusive classrooms in the local elementary school may affect this study. The methodological choices of one-on-one interviews and demographic data sheets may cause limitations to this study. The overall goal was to be considerate of these structures, criteria, methods, and processes for this research while offering a reflection of the benefits as well as the limitations (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Data Analysis Results

The objective of this study's data analysis was to find a meaningful conclusion from the data collection. The analysis of data in qualitative research involves methods for making sense of information obtained concerning the research questions (Creswell, 2012). The interview data generated provided a comprehensive understanding of the general and special education teachers' and administrators' perceptions regarding the local phenomenon. The participants were asked to respond to interview questions which related to the study's research questions: (a) What do the general and special education teachers feel are the reasons for the high rate of suspensions for students identified as LD at the local school setting?; (b) What do the administrators, including the special education director and the assistant principal, feel are the reasons for the high rate of suspensions for students identified as LD at the local school setting?; (c) How do general and special education teachers implement the PBIS model and methods in classroom management in the inclusive setting? The interview protocol was a tool that provided a better understanding of the teachers' and administrators' knowledge and perceptions of behavior interventions in the inclusive classroom. Areas of interest at the local elementary school were related to the forums for instructional decisions, the recently implemented PBIS, the methods in classroom management, and the disproportionate number of suspensions for students with a LD. Below are specific findings related to each of the research questions in this project study. Transcripts and notes are included.

Research Question 1

What do the general and special education teachers feel are the reasons for the high rate of suspensions for students identified as LD at the local school setting? The school has positive intervention in place as a form of preventing suspensions and other exclusionary disciplines. When asked, "What are the positive interventions in place to influence students' success in your school/classroom?", two teachers had no comment. The other participants' utilization of strategies for positive interventions varied. Participant 2 stated, "I give the students daily, midweek, weekly, and midquarter and quarter academic goals. They have a chart in the board to constantly update their own progress."

Participant 3 stated,

I am not the type of teacher who rewards students for good behavior or good grades. It is my personal believe that children must understand that good behavior is the norm and good grades are the result of hard work; for example; I do not give my students extra recess if they behave well, I give them extra recess if they work hard to achieve their goals. They must understand that each one of us has different talents, strengths, and weaknesses. We must work to refine our talents, improve our strengths, and overcome our weaknesses. They are praised for good behavior and celebrated for achievements.

Participant 6 stated,

I use an incentive system based on what the students like to do. I also use daily or weekly charts for students with Behavior Intervention Plans. The students sign a contract and we establish the rewards and the consequences together as a team.

Participant 8 stated,

I believe in intrinsic motivation so I rarely use a rewards based system with my students. We instead have discussions on a regular basis about how doing the right thing and striving for excellence in self is its own reward.

Participant 12 stated,

I take time developing relationships with all of my students. I encourage students to embrace failure. Our motto is, we embrace failure because we learn more from failure than we can learn from success.

Participant 14 discussed,

The most important intervention in place in my classroom is the formation of a positive student-teacher relationship. I try to make sure I get to know my students individually. In turn, that allows me to know how to approach them if a misbehavior occurs. I respect them in the same manner I expect them to respect me. I also make sure that I make my procedures and expectations known. Students also know the consequences for not following procedures. Consistency is key. I also have a punch card system in which students can earn a punch in the card when they are caught following directions, being kind, being prepared, etc. After the card is full, the students can exchange the card for a prize. Verbal praise

is another positive intervention. I make sure I acknowledge students who are doing the right thing publicly while trying to minimize attention to misbehaviors.

The levels of emphasis for intervention varied from participants saying they had no comment to similarities with steps taken to prevent exclusionary discipline. A few teachers found importance in building a relationship between the students in the class and the classroom teacher. Other teachers did not find the need to reward behaviors as the classroom expectation included positive behavioral interactions. The variations were evident as Participant 8 said she believed in intrinsic motivation, so she rarely uses rewards.

Research Question 2

What do the administrators, including the special education director and the assistant principal, feel are the reasons for the high rate of suspensions for students identified as LD at the local school setting? When asked "What are the positive interventions in place to influence students' success in your school/classroom?", the two administrators' comments gave the impression they were on the opposite ends of the spectrum. Participant 1 stated, "Some of our school positive interventions to help students are monthly celebrations, weekly and daily reinforcements given by teachers, and we are also in the process of creating a school PBIS store. This store will allow students a chance to buy positive reinforcement items that they have earned for various positive actions that they are exhibited during school". Participant 10 stated, "At this time I don't know of any positive interventions in place to influence student success".

The administrators were asked to comment further when asked, "How are positive social exchanges, reinforcement procedures, and preventive punishment strategies used in your school/classroom?" Participant 1 spoke of, "Strategies used every day by the teachers, which have had input on how procedures can be used in the school". He stated, "For the most part our transition to a PBIS school has been greatly accepted by our staff, and we continue to be updated and revamp our procedures and strategies". Participant 10 stated, "Reinforcement procedures are implemented".

Research Question 3

How do general and special education teachers implement the PBIS model and methods in classroom management in the inclusive setting? While several teachers and administrators discussed the implementation on PBIS, the responses revealed various levels of implementation. Two of the 10 participants' comments included PBIS rewards. In the response to the question "Does your school have a formal structured plan detailing the interventions of PBIS? Comment on the recent implementation of the PBIS tier system of support. Four participants had no comment. Participant 2 stated, "There was a school-wide PBIS plan in place that rewarded weekly, monthly, and quarterly. There is still an intervention plan that has to be followed to track negative behavior". Participant 3 stated, "Yes, my school has a formal structured plan detailing the interventions of PBIS. However, it is not followed by all the teachers. It is sad, but I personally believe that PBIS is not going to work in our school. Our behavior problems are reflections of our community problems. Students' behavior will not improve if parents' behavior doesn't change". Participant 6 responded, "The school has a plan for implementing

PBIS, but honestly not all teachers are using it as told. I am not very familiar with PBIS tier system of support". Participant 14 stated, "We currently are not implementing or promoting PBIS true to its nature".

Summary of Results

There were variations with an indication of the evidence-based strategies to support the student in the inclusive classroom. The teachers' and administrators' responses seem transparent and honest. Based on the answers to the interview questions, there is inconsistency with forums used for instructional decisions and the impact of the recently implemented PBIS. The depictions of the methods for classroom management methods varied from one participant to the next participant. The data relating to the questions about the disproportionate number of suspensions for students with a LD was inconclusive.

Throughout the interviews conducted for this study, general and special education teachers referred to the changes in place with a focus on academics. Participant 2 summed up the teachers' outlook on the emphasis on academics when she stated, "Our focus is mainly academic which promotes student driven success and results which in turn decreases negativity in the classroom and promotes positive encouragement among staff and students." An administrator's comment echoed the attention given to academics as he addressed the climate of the school. He stated, "The climate and culture of the Elementary School is positive. Teachers are focused on the academic achievement of our students. More can be done to address the social and emotional needs of our students.

Hopefully, through increased implementation of PBIS we will improve our efforts to address the needs of the whole child."

All participants referenced the methods for classroom management in an inclusive setting. There were some reoccurring themes with the past use of the PBIS sheet, also called an infraction form. The participants expressed that they have preventive punishment strategies used in their school and classrooms. When asked about adding to what is available for professional development, the general and special education teachers expressed the need for additional opportunities for various types of professional training. The two administrators discussed the need to provide additional training in systems to support the implementation of PBIS.

Patterns, Relationships, and Themes

Data collections and data analysis transpired for six weeks, via text and emails. After the face to face introduction, we developed a plan to share the interview protocol via email and a follow-up text message as a reminder. The responses via email confirmed the participation with the consent form, presented personal information through the demographic survey, and provided the completed interview protocol with data. Next, I began coding by recognizing the main issues and ideas in the data (Clark & Veale, 2018). I highlighted the participants' responses on the interview transcript that might form categories, descriptive codes, and analytic codes (Merriam & Tisdel, 2016). Table 1 breaks the data into categories based on participants' responses. During the coding process, I looked for patterns, then chose categories based on those patterns and their relationships to the research questions. When connecting the themes to the research

questions, four areas for additional research emerged. Those categories were training the

trainer, multi-tiered systems and support (MTSS), mentoring, and professional learning

communities (PLC's).

Table 1

Quantity of Times for Theme

Themes	Evidence of Terms	Total Times Mentioned
Academic Need/Goals	o expectations to strive for academic goals o quarterly academic goals o social and emotional goals o working together to set goals	5
Behavior	o attention to misbehaviors o document their behavior o school-wide behavior plan o increase appropriate behavior o practice appropriate behavior o consequences for inappropriate behavior o dealing with disruptive behavior o accept responsibility for their behavior o prevent such behavior o minimizing problem behavior o behavior reports	23
Positive Interventions Daily/Weekly	o academic goals o academic/behavior reports o acknowledge students o chart o choice of rewards o consequences o incentive system o none in place o rewards	11

Themes	Evidence of Terms	Total Times Mentioned
Professional/Staff Development	o educators are trained o is minimal at best o staff/PBIS team meetings	3
Relationships	o build a relationship with students and parents o good working relationship o positive student-teacher relationship o staff work together	6
Teach and Reinforce	o increase appropriate behavior o maintain a positive classroom climate o new skills	8

Discrepant Cases

The methods in place to appropriately handle discrepant cases were triangulation and members checking (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). When attempting to achieve validity, Ravitch and Carl (2016) recommended using multiple sources of investigation and participant validation methods. During the data analysis stage, I gave direct attention to discrepant data to determine the credibility and dependability of this study. The 10 participants' perspectives were highlighted to ensure findings were accurate, realistic, and valid (Maxwell, 2013). The data collected reflected the perceptions of general and special education teachers and two administrators at an elementary school in a rural southern state.

Evidence of Quality

The two significant steps taken to ensure that a high standard of research quality was maintained were member checking and triangulation. Triangulation was in place as I interviewed 10 participants to draw a range of information from multiple data sources (Lambert, 2012). Table 2 displays the breakdown of the participants, along with their job titles. A member check is a strategy to "check-in" with participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p.4). After reviewing each interview transcript, I shared the analysis with the participant to help foster the validity of the study and to ensure the accuracy of the interpretation of information. As suggested by Ravitch and Carl (2016), each participant received an analysis of the interview transcript as a validation strategy. Each participant received an email of the transcript outlining the interview, with a request to evaluate my interpretation of their interview data. Participants were given ten days to review the transcripts for accuracy, the researcher's interpretation, and to identify any changes needed. Five interviewees provided feedback with comments of appreciation and availability for future requirements. There was no discrepant feedback from the interviewees.

Table 2

Number of Participants	*Present Role as an Educator*
Participant 1	Administrator
Participant 2	5th Grade Teacher
Participant 3	5th Grade Teacher
Participant 5	5th Grade Special Education Teacher
Participant 6	4th and 6th Grade Special Education Teacher

Number of Participants	*Present Role as an Educator*
Participant 7	6th Grade Special Education Teacher
Participant 8	4th Grade Teacher
Participant 10	Administrator
Participant 12	6th Grade Teacher
Participant 14	4th Grade Teacher

Note: Fifteen potential participants provided personal emails with a verbal agreement to take part in the study. Twelve educators sent back the email with the consent to participate. Ten participants completed the interview process. Five interviewees responded with feedback after receiving the transcript outlining the interview.

Summary

The plan for this study was to examine the perceptions of general and special education teachers and administrators to gain more in-depth information regarding local students identified as LD receiving a disproportionate number of suspensions due to their disruptive behavior. The interview questions were used to gather individuals' perceptions of the different challenges with the implementation of the PBIS and the current methods of classroom management used when teaching students with a LD. Three research questions were used in this study in an attempt to identify whether the recent implementation of the PBIS has behavioral outcomes that influence students with a LD. This study addressed the following research questions:

Q1: What do the general and special education teachers feel are the reasons for the high rate of suspensions for students identified as LD at the local school setting?

Q2: What do the administrators, including the special education director and the assistant principal, feel are the reasons for the high rate of suspensions for students identified as LD at the local school setting?

Q3: How do general and special education teachers implement the PBIS model and methods in classroom management in the inclusive setting?

Overall, the data showed the general and special education teachers' perceptions and experiences surrounding the implementation of the PBIS model were minimal to non-compliant. When asked about the application of PBIS, the administrators referred to the previous school year. Each participant had knowledge of the PBIS system of support, though the description of implementation varied. The common finding throughout the data was the use of various methods of classroom management in the inclusive setting.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study was based on the positive social exchanges that take place in the classroom that is managed with evidenced-based practices (Ross, 2015). Ross' framework to become a BOSS (behavioral opportunities for social skills) offers teachers evidenced-based step-by-step practices that are designed to help teachers with the effective management of discipline problems (Ross, 2015). During the interview each teacher was asked about challenges in the classroom and evidence-based practices to manage the functioning of students with LDs to decrease suspension rates. Each participant found different challenges with teaching the student with a LD.

When asked about the challenges or obstacles recently encountered while working with students in the inclusive classroom, Participant 1 stated,

>One major challenge, would have to be change. These students do not adjust to change easily. Whether it's change in their daily schedule or with staff. So to help with this, teachers need to be very procedural and students need to know in advance, to help them be better prepared. This is why procedures and rules are very important in any classroom.

Participant 2 stated,

>Challenges I face is to give the same expectations to special education inclusion students although they spend some time out of the classroom as well completing a separate curriculum.

Participant 3 stated,

>Disruptive behavior is the main challenge I have faced recently. Every student is different and the teacher needs to learn more about each student in order to be successful in the classroom.

Participant 8 stated,

>Students being required to test and complete assignments based on their grade level instead of their actual abilities. I meet students at their level and then try to give them practice at grade level activities as well.

Participant 14 stated,

>The biggest challenge I face is finding the time to adequately give each student what he or she needs. I also find that larger class sizes make it difficult to address

individual academic needs, especially of those with learning disabilities. It

always seems as though I am in a race against the clock.

After sharing the challenges, the participants outlined a number of classroom

interventions. Evidence-based interventions are grounded and tested for effectiveness in

various research (McIntosh, & Goodman, 2016). The data gathered regarding the general

and special education teachers' and administrators' perceptions helped to define the

instructional practices and the behavior management systems in the classroom.

When asked about the positive interventions in place to influence students'

success in your school/classroom Participant 1 stated,

Some of our school positive interventions to help students are monthly

celebrations, weekly and daily reinforcements given by teachers, and we are also

in the process of creating a school PBIS store. This store will allow students a

chance to buy positive reinforcement items that they have earned for various

positive actions that they are exhibited during school.

Participant 2 stated,

I give the students daily, mid-week, weekly and mid quarter and quarter

(academic) goals. They have a chart in the board to constantly update their own

progress.

Participant 3 stated,

I am not the type of teacher who rewards students for good behavior or good

grades. It is my personal believe that children must understand that good behavior

is the norm and good grades are the result of hard work; for example; I do not

give my students extra recess if they behave well, I give them extra recess if they

work hard to achieve their goals. They must understand that each one of us has

different talents, strengths, and weaknesses. We must work to refine our talents,

improve our strengths, and overcome our weaknesses. They are praised for good

behavior and celebrated for achievements.

Participant 6 stated,

I use an incentive system based on what the students like to do. I also use daily or

weekly charts for students with Behavior Intervention Plans. The students sign a

contract and we establish the rewards and the consequences together as a team.

Participant 8 stated,

I believe in intrinsic motivation so I rarely use a rewards base system with my

students. We instead have discussions on a regular basis about how doing the

right thing and striving for excellence in self is its own reward.

Participant 10 stated,

At this time, I don't know of any positive interventions in place to influence

student success.

Participant 12 stated,

I take time developing relationships with all of my students. I encourage students

to embrace failure. Our motto is "We embrace failure because we learn more from

failure than we can learn from success."

Participant 14 stated,

The most important intervention in place in my classroom is the formation of a positive student-teacher relationship. I try to make sure I get to know my students individually. In turn, that allows me to know how to approach them if a misbehavior occurs. I respect them in the same manner I expect them to respect me. I also make sure that I make my procedures and expectations known. Students also know the consequences for not following procedures. Consistency is key.

I also have a punch card system in which students can earn a punch in the card when they are caught following directions, being kind, being prepared, etc. After the card is full, the students can exchange the card for a prize.

Verbal praise is another positive intervention. I make sure I acknowledge students who are doing the right thing publicly while trying to minimize attention to misbehaviors.

There was some deviation among the participants' recollection of interventions and strategies employed to support the local students identified with a LD receiving excessive suspensions due to their disruptive behavior. Skinner's (1938) theory of operant conditioning addresses student engagement with social and physical environments. The participants review of the literature identified some diversity in the reinforcements used in the classroom/school. A summary of most participants' interventions to prevent negative behaviors and elicit the desired behavior would be comparable to Skinner's (1938) model of operant conditioning for changing undesirable or disruptive behaviors. Skinner's (1938, 1953) theory of operant conditioning identifies

how positive reinforcement and changes to the environment strengthen the students'

positive reactions to expected behaviors while removing unpleasant experiences

(McLeod, 2015). While the interviewees' description of positive interventions was

followed up with expected behavior, the inconsistencies among the participants as to

interventions and strategies employed from one classroom to the next indicated some

thematic relationships.

Project Deliverable

Findings from this study have indicated that professional development could

support the general and special education teachers with the implementation of the PBIS

and evidence-based interventions to improve the learning environment. Professional

development is a vital tool employed by educators to assist with the successful planned,

implemented, and evaluated support system (Karlin, Ottenbreit-Leftwich, Ozogul, & Lio,

2018). The professional development training will be a tool used by the administrators to

support general and special education teachers with increasing knowledge of strategies

for improving the behavioral outcome of all students.

The deliverable portion of this project is a professional development for the

general and special education teachers. The project description includes an outline of the

active components, the timeline, and the roles and responsibilities of those involved. The

focus of the teacher training will be training the trainer, multi-tiered systems and support

(MTSS), mentoring, and professional learning communities (PLC's). The key findings of

this study showed that the participants are actively implementing strategies to support the

students identified with a LD in the inclusive classroom. However, not all interventions

are evidence-based, which indicates a prerequisite for teacher training to support the

implementation of evidence-based interventions.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore general and special education teachers' and administrators' perceptions and gather information regarding the implementation of the PBIS and how the application supports local students identified with a LD receiving excessive suspensions due to their disruptive behavior. The research conducted in this qualitative study provides a means for evaluating evidence-based practices that support students identified with a LD in the inclusive classroom at an elementary school in a rural town in South Carolina. Although there was a recent implementation of a PBIS, there was little to no feedback about the effectiveness of the strategies directly relating to the PBIS. A project resulting from this study is a staff development that focuses on strengthening abilities of the general and special education teachers. Data collection from the local elementary school revealed the administrators' emphasis on additional training in PBIS tier two and three strategies. The teachers interviewed emphasized a need for additional knowledge concerning student peer mentoring and training for the trainers. Based on the study findings, I designed a three-day professional development conference with a book study workshop for general and special education teachers at the local elementary school.

The project lays out a plan for the teachers that offers a PowerPoint structured to support the acceptance of evidence-based strategies used in the inclusive classroom to assist students identified with a LD. Moreover, this project seeks to amplify skillsets of the general and special educators who are also professional learners by increasing knowledge through research-based changes that raise the results for all students.

Continuous professional development provides educators with learning opportunities to

sustain long term goals, to provide learning opportunities. Professional development is

also used to regulates current practices (Sun, Penuel, Frank, Gallagher, & Youngs, 2013).

In section three, I will describe the project, the project implications, the project evaluation

plan, and the rationale for the project.

Rationale

As explained in Section 1, there has been a recent drive to provide high-quality

instruction while maintaining a safe and healthy learning environment for the students

identified with a LD in the school setting. This movement has directed the integration of

a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) (Lane, Carter, Jenkins, Dwiggins, & Germer,

2015). Lane's et al. (2015) study on supporting comprehensive, integrated preventive

tiered models highlights the benefits for the evidence-based PBIS. The PBIS model is

known to assist students' social and behavioral abilities while promoting academic

growth (Flannery, Fenning, Kato, & McIntosh, 2014; Lane, Carter, Jenkins, Dwiggins, &

Germer, 2015; Oram, Owens, & Maras, 2016). This project identifies teaching strategies

to reinforce positive behaviors, drawn from Skinner's (1938) model of operant

conditioning for changing undesirable or disruptive behaviors. An exploration of

teachers' and administrators' perceptions referencing students' social and behavioral

needs in the general education inclusive classroom revealed aspects used to support the

development of this project study.

I decided to create a professional development training because studies show that

when educators are involved in professional development, their motivational levels are

accelerated (Cheon, Reeve, Lee, & Lee, 2018). Additionally, this staff training will offer the general and special education teachers an overview of the evidence-based professional learning strategies recommended to assist students identified with a LD in the inclusive classroom. An increase in professional development promotes teachers' specialized competence and sense of control when working in the school environment (Cheon et al., 2018; Gordozidis & Papaioannou, 2014; Luft & Hewson, 2014; Whitworth & Chiu, 2015; Zwart, Korthagen, & Attema-Noordewier, 2015). More specifically, the district administrator reported there is a need for additional training in PBIS tier two and tier three teaching strategies (school principal, personal communication, December 2019). In a recent study, Cunningham et al.'s, (2015) description of professional development promotes leading methods for meeting the whole (all teachers). The use of this project will provide the general and special education teachers of the local elementary school with some evidence-based strategies which would amplify change within the professional capital through professional development.

Review of Literature

The goal of this review of the literature was to promote a quality project study based on scholarly peer-reviewed articles from online databases. The databases used to initiate queries, and gain DOI numbers, retrieve new journal titles, and recover pieces were ProQuest, Education Research, SAGE Premier, and ERIC. The keywords and phrases used to conduct the research included *special education, disruptive behaviors*, *positive behavior interventions, and support (PBIS), multi-tiered systems and support (MTSS)*, *motivating teacher*, *classroom management, functional behaviors and*

assessments (FBA), professional development, *professional learning communities*

(PLC's) and more. Based on the data analysis, the four areas highlighted in the literature

to assist the project are professional development, multi-tiered systems and support

(MTSS), mentoring, and professional learning communities.

Professional Development

Professional development is a form of training increasingly used by leadership

teams from educational institutions to instruct staff through informative short-term

courses (Evans, 2014; Hoyle, 2012; Jones & Dexter, 2014; Scheerens & Blomeke, 2016).

The recent evaluation of the best practices for the integration of models for teacher

education identified various areas of interest. Scheerens and Blomeke's (2016) depiction

of a causal pathway for teaching the teacher reported a positive outcome with classroom

effectiveness and school reform. The teachers' education or training affects school-wide

success and results. The teachers' knowledge may impact the effectiveness of

instructional quality and student achievement (Scheerens & Blömeke, 2016). Both

instructional quality and student success are connected to students' challenging behaviors

in the school setting.

A review of professional development models and research established a

correlation between organizational training and personal development to help sustain

effective methods for educating teachers. A present-day model outlined by Scheerens and

Blömeke (2016) offers a comprehensive professional development that includes

alternative teaching strategies to assist with challenges in the inclusive classroom. The

wide range of training includes materials referencing the requirements for policy when

implementing curriculum, teacher and school accountability, and the value of evaluation to govern and maintain management. In addition to the district's professional development, teachers also engage in other forms of personal growth, such as taking part in self-directed online courses, informal learning, and independent learning (Barton, 2018).

There are pedagogical content areas in professional development to assist teachers in achieving long-term goals. Often schools separate the staff by content area when administering training. Abd-El-Khalick, Destefano, and Houseal (2014) found that teachers influencing students' motivation to learn, attitudes toward science, and perspective with gaining knowledge was directly related to pedagogical content knowledge. The modern-day teacher's proficiency in content knowledge can be connected to the students' skill set (Basile, Kimbrough, Koellner, & Swackhamer, 2009). The teacher's ability to recognize self-efficacy continues to be a significant attribute to the effectiveness of teaching. Swackhamer, Koellner, Basile, and Kimbrough (2009) identified the correlations between professional development and teachers' effectiveness.

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

When building academic and behavioral success in the school setting, administrators have incorporated the multi-tiered system of support (MTSS). Brown-Chidsey and Bickford (2016) have composed a practical handbook to assist teachers and administrators in building academic and behavioral success in schools. The content structure within the handbook places importance on prevention and relates to students in all settings and the values in the public schools. When using the MTSS, Brown-Chidsey

and Bickford suggested building a strong school foundation with standards, curriculum, and programs in the school to promote student success.

The MTSS method for supporting all students includes a teaming and collaborative approach. The school's action plan for school-wide success relies on data. Teachers and administrators can use data for problem-solving, making change, and developing instructions. The recent attempt to combine two approaches as a part of school reform relied on the implementation of an academic response to interventions (RTI; Brown-Chidney & Steege, 2010) and school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS, Sugai & Horner, 2009). The integrated MTSS based on McIntosh and Goodman's (2016) action plan to blend RTI and PBIS will provide all students with access to high-quality instruction academically and behaviorally.

Both RTI and PBIS systems are data-driven interventions. However, McIntosh and Goodman (2016) identified similarities and differences that distinguish academic RTI from PBIS. There is a focus on teaming. Teaming is widely used in the MTSS (Brown-Chidsey & Bickford, 2016; McIntosh & Goodman, 2016). Comparable to the purpose of the teaming in the special education system for support, the goal for the MTSS team is to identify a group of professionals to allocate the best practices based on data to support students in various levels of instruction. The "Practical Handbook of MTSS" provides a model for the use of data (Brown-Chidsey & Bickford, 2016). Using data in the implementation and intervention stages on a MTSS will impact the student learning outcomes, also it can contribute to the effectiveness in social encounters while preventing problems in the school setting.

Mentoring

In the inclusive classroom, the teacher is the facilitator of relationships. The educators' long term goal is to prepare all students for post-secondary education (Florian, 2014). In the public school setting, ample attention has been given to support both teachers' and students' success. Partnerships with outside agencies have been established to work toward servicing students in the school setting has been a prominent initiative for the last decade in the United States (Florian, 2014; Wolfendale, 2002). The services have changed some of the institutional obstacles that use to hinder the learning for some students identified with a LD. In most school districts, there are networks for educators seeking assistance with serving students.

The behavior support team (BST) is a network for educators that offers membership to teachers and administrators, social workers, community support workers, nurses (who look after children), residential childcare workers, educational development workers, mental health workers, and informative link workers (Todd, 2014). Todd's (2014) comprehensive list of BSTs includes networking with parents, parenting coordinators, education psychologists, clinical psychologists, local educational offices (museum and art galleries), public support offices, and parent support workers. Robinson, Atkinson, and Downing (2008) researched 35 papers focusing on mentor models and theories of multiple agencies and services. A common trend throughout the mentoring support programs was the use of collaborative and integrative services in place to reach students in the school settings. The collaborative system model of human development

fosters a strength-based approach to support a positive learning environment (DuBios & Karcher, 2014).

The significance of building a collaborative mentoring system of support that relies on best practices, research, and theory was the theme in the Handbook of Youth and Mentoring (DubBois & David, 2014). The checklist for facilitators of the collaborative mentoring program includes developing a plan of ongoing refinement goals and approaches, used to build a collaboration between practitioners and researchers, which ensures initiatives move towards refining the program's present practices (DuBois & David, 2014). DuBois and David (2014) suggest facilitators of programs implement policy based on program goals, best practices, and initiatives to maintain growth. A developmental mentoring program may yield positive outcomes over time (Karcher, 2008).

An examination of mentoring programs revealed various types of programs implemented in the school setting. The Handbook of Youth Mentoring (2014) offers readers different formats for mentoring program topics which includes: (a) peer mentoring, in which a support youth mentors another youth; (b) traditional mentoring, in which one adult is assigned to mentor one youth; (c) team mentoring, which allows for several adults to work with small groups of youth; (d) e-mentoring, which takes place online via email and internet; and (e) group mentoring, in which one adult is assigned to assist a group of youth. Each one of the mentoring formats has potential benefits in the school setting (DuBois & Karcher, 2014). The school-based program supports the

administration, guidance counselors, and teachers because of the easy access to students (Herrera & Karcher, 2014).

The Mentor Handbook (2014) identifies best practices for an effective mentor program. The characteristics are broken down into four basic categories: program design and planning, program management, program operations, and program evaluation. The research regarding the effectiveness of the school-based mentoring programs has been one-sided. The positive outcomes were reported in numerous studies (Dappen & Isernhagen, 2005; DuBois, Holloway, Valentine & Harris, 2002; DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Verthorn & Valentine, 2011; Gordon et al., 2013; Grossman & Tierney, 1998; Herrera et al., 2011; Portwood et al., 2005; Wheeler, Keller & DuBois, 2010).

Professional Learning Communities (PLC)

The use of a professional learning community (PLC) offers the practitioner strategies to assist in accelerating learning and promotes instructional methods for the elementary school classroom. The findings demonstrate that the teachers in the local elementary school were skillful and confident in the existing inclusive settings. However, the collaborative model was lacking in some areas, which resulted in inconsistencies and an achievement gap among students in the different classes. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA) focus on accountability and closing the gap among the subgroups of students in preschool through high school (Blanton & Perez, 2011). Blanton and Perez's (2011) recognized the relationship between the implementation of PLCs and closing the gap by improving classroom practices.

The public school system uses the traditional faculty meeting to engage educators in learning opportunities as a form of PLC. Educators engage in collaborative gatherings to discuss a topic and often share knowledge as a result of a book study. These gatherings often fail to produce an outcome that leads to a higher learning experience for the stakeholders. The teachers leave the meeting with no effective strategies to support the students' growth and development. The difficult shift to an accountable professional learning community with meaningful scholarly outcomes is available with the implementation of the outlined strategies and material offered by researchers such as DuFour and Reeves (2016). The outline in Appendix A was established by applying critical pieces of the research-based strategies for implementation of a PLC as set forth by DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, Many, and Mattos (2016), as described and illustrated in Roberts' (2016) handbook.

Since 1998, DuFour and his colleagues have written various books and published videos with two goals in mind: to assist educators with specific strategies to help all students and to support schools and district-specific policies as they renovate their structures. Strategy and plans may vary based on each case study. Bailey and Jakicic's (2011) toolkit for adapting the present PLC highlights six steps to ensure perceptions of the process have been met and will be maintained. The "Learning by Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work" provides a six-step protocol for ensuring team members' safety, providing structures that are formal and sometime less systematic (DuFour et al. 2016). The team will use a data collection tool to establish SMART goals for the team to analyze. Annual goals will be developed based on the

accomplished goals from the months and years prior. Once a school district has effective

PLC strategies and structures in place, a book study may be conducted with one of the

handbooks available to support the implementation of a successful PLC.

<div align="center">

Project Description

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

</div>

There is a shortlist of resources needed for the implementation of the professional

development and PLC sessions. The school will need to order copies of the book:

"Learning by Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work."

The teachers will receive an email about the date and time of the training. The first

training will take place during the summer academy workshop scheduled in August. The

second and third dates will be scheduled during the first training session. In addition to

general and special education teachers, the school administrators will be encouraged to

take part in the training. The best scenario would bring each school together

independently for school-wide practices.

The proposal for the professional development supports the general and special

education teachers of the local elementary school. The title of the suggested PowerPoint

is Amplify Aptitudes. The goals of the professional training sessions are to give the

educators an overview of the local demographics and to outline the impact of school

suspension data. After the summary of the local statistics, the educators will be given

highlights of the selected topics based on the themes related to the research from this

study.

Potential Barriers and Solutions

The PowerPoint in Appendix A provides the specifics for the application of the professional development. In most training scenarios, there are some expected barriers. Preventive measures will be taken to plan the best possible training sessions. Considerations will be put in place to address the audience, setting, and difficulties that may arise. Stakeholders will be notified of the training dates with ample time to make preparations. A reminder notification will be given via email and hard copy. The setting for the training will be checked to ensure technological devices are suited for the PowerPoint presentation. Snacks will be provided to help set the tone for the day of learning. The timeline, roles for supportive staff, and responsibilities will be discussed and delegated before the end of the 2020 school year to ensure the plan is in place for the 2020 summer academy.

Proposal Implementation and Timetable

The plan for implementation of the proposed project will begin at the end of the 2020 school year. Before the staff is released for the school year, training coordinators will develop the plan for the summer academy training sessions. Summer academy is the allotted time for mandatory district-wide professional development. Implementation of the project will take place during summer academy, second semester PLC, and third semester PLC. The proposed timeline:

May 2020

- Planning for Summer Academy

August 2020

- Session (1) Summer Academy *Train the Trainer- Team Building*

September 2020

- Session (2) PLC *Student Peer Mentoring*

October 2020

- Session (3) PLC *PBIS Tier One, Two & Three*

November 2020

- Book Study *Learning by doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work*

Roles and Responsibilities

The plan is to acknowledge the roles and responsibilities before the end of the 2020 school year. I will take the role of the facilitator by presenting the outline for the study to the administrators. My position as the facilitator requires working with training coaches and administrators to organize the communication with general and special education teachers about the requirements and expectations for each training session. The plan is to work closely with the coaches and administrators to ensure the physical setting is prepared for the training in August, the book is ordered, and there is an accountability procedure in place for the general and special education teachers.

<p align="center">**Project Evaluation Plan**</p>

The plan to ensure the validity of the project includes both formative and summative data analysis. Ravitch and Carl (2016) discussed using formative and summative data analysis when assessing qualitative data. The definition of formative assessment entails encompassing all those activities undertaken by the teacher, which

provide information to be used as a form of feedback (Andersson & Palm, 2017). The professional development will use the formative assessment based on the teachers' and administrators' input before, during, and after learning. A summative evaluation will be completed after each professional development and PLC (Saeed, Tahir, and Latif, 2018). The review will be used to assess the decisions made about the information presented during the training. Both formative and summative evaluations will be used to guide future professional development.

Project Implications

Possible Social Change

This project has the potential to impact stakeholders at various levels. I am beginning with the administrators. Offering the professional development in Team Building, Peer Mentoring, and PBIS Tier One, Two & Three at the local elementary school could provide an opportunity for general and special education teachers to achieve additional skills training and knowledge. The knowledge obtained will offer the probable influence of helping educators understand the district standards while unifying the aptitude of the teachers and administrators to educate students identified with a LD in the inclusive classroom at the local elementary school. Providing instructional solutions to improve the overall outcomes for the students in the inclusive class is the goal of this paper.

Local Stakeholders Implications

` Once the training has been implemented, the student will be impacted by evidenced-based knowledge. Studies on supporting comprehensive, integrated

preventive tiered models have highlighted the benefits of evidence-based practice in

positive behavioral supports (Lane et al., 2015). Local stakeholders using the evidence-

based models to assist students to improve social and behavioral abilities will probably

see the impact with the academic growth (Flannery, Fenning, Kato, & McIntosh, 2014;

Lane et al., 2015; Oram, Owens, & Maras, 2016). The general and special education

teachers in the study referred to the emphasis with a plan for school-wide academic

growth. Unfortunately, the report showed inconsistencies throughout the school.

Administrators mentioned the need for continued training in the PBIS. The professional

development has the potential to impact the local stakeholders by addressing the

challenges, needs, and future endeavors. Throughout the interview process, the staff of

the participating school shared their desire to help all students achieve and be successful

in school. One day these students will be members of society and a part of the

workforce. Promoting positive behaviors and supports today may impact the

community's progressive future tomorrow.

Section 4: Reflection and Conclusion

Project Strengths, Limitations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine and gather information regarding the implementation of the PBIS and how the application supports local students identified with a LD receiving excessive suspensions due to their disruptive behavior. The recent implementation of PBIS in the local school district may have shaped behavioral outcomes for the students identified as LD. The participants outlined some of the procedures in the inclusive classroom that are beneficial to the learning environment, which can eventually enhance students' academic growth and prevent disruptive behaviors that may lead to exclusionary consequences (i.e., suspension).

A reflection of this qualitative study is grounded using Skinner's (1938) theory of operant conditioning and Ross' (2015) behavioral opportunities for social skills (BOSS) theory. Skinner's (1938) theory of operant conditioning addresses student engagement with social and physical environments. Ross' (2015) BOSS theory is based on establishing the foundation for a learning environment that is grounded in constructs of modeling the target behavior, allowing time for practice, and increasing the positive feedback about the process.

This study's validity and the decision to investigate was strengthened by the 2017 district-wide data reported that students with LD represented 9% of the school population and accounted for 27% out-of-school suspensions. When compared to their general education peers in the local school district, this data demonstrates a disproportionate number of total suspensions for students identified as LD. This study is based on a local

occurrence. Implementation of the professional development suggested in Appendix 1 has the potential to support a positive change for students identified with a LD.

When selecting an instrument to gather data, specific consideration was given to ensure rigor with consistency. Interviews were used to collect the general and special education teachers' and administrators' perceptions of the evidence-based instructional strategies in place to support the student in the inclusive classroom. Deliberate thought was given to the process of providing clear and concise information to the participants before, during, and after the interview. The letter of consent gave the potential participants specific details on the study. I developed an interview protocol that was not leading, which helped in the acquisition of data that was true to the interviewees' recollection of the learning environment. A follow-up letter sent to each interviewee outlining the interview transcript allowed for a response of agreement or disapproval. No interviewee disapproved of their review of the transcript.

The construct of additional resources is an added strength and hopeful outcome of professional development. Professional development is a forum used to reinforce teachers' knowledge and classroom practices, thus, improving the academic performance of the students in the inclusive classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2015; DuFour, 2015). This project study resulted in a plan for professional development to support the general and special education teachers with assisting the students identified with a LD. The planned staff training will address the evidence-based intervention needed to improve the classroom structures and decrease the disproportionate number of suspensions for the student displaying disruptive behaviors in the inclusive classroom. A plan for

implementation of professional learning communities (PLC's) offers the educators of the local elementary school a long-term training solution.

The project from this study was designed based on the research findings, but there is the possibility of limitations. The limitations could take place when there is not a complete buy-in from stakeholders. There has not been a commitment to purchase the handbooks for the training, which could cause difficulty with presenting the new information. Fundamentals such as cost have the potential to be the root of a limitation. The plan for implementation of the training has not been finalized. Financial (budget) and time constraints are limitations in this project study. A recommendation for an alternative approach to the data collection would involve observations along with the interviews. The challenges of data collection may have affected the transparency of the study and caused limitations.

Recommendation for an Alternative Approach

The problem investigated through this study was whether the disproportionate numbers of suspensions for students identified as LD were impacted by the recent implementation of the PBIS. A recommendation for an alternative approach to supporting the student identified as LD is mentoring. Mentoring programs in the classroom setting offer potential benefits to the entire school (DuBois & Karcher, 2014). The school-based mentoring program supports the administration, guidance counselors, and teachers because of the easy access for students (Herrera & Karcher, 2014). Another recommendation for improving the classroom and school climate is ongoing professional development using PLC. The integration of PLCs might support the teachers and

administrators with carrying out the evidence-based strategies at a higher level of intensity to help the students identified with a LD in inclusive classrooms.

The basic qualitative study offered data to formulate a reflection and conclusion about the local elementary school. A recommendation for an alternative approach to the data collection would involve observations along with interviews. Research methods that include focus groups have the potential to broaden the study and shape the analysis and data collection (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The forum for a focus group can be face to face or online. Efficiency in the data relies on notes, digital media, journals, professional documents, reflective writing, and transcripts. Questionnaires and surveys may be used in addition to interviews and observations. The effectiveness of data collection would encompass various resources to triangulate information.

Scholarship

I have chosen to study the general and special education teachers' and administrators' perceptions of the recent implementation of the PBIS in the local school district. There are behaviors in the inclusive classroom that are detrimental to the learning environment, which can eventually elicit exclusionary consequences for students identified with a LD. I believe that the insight into this research arena will contribute to my understanding the disparity within the system and the large number of students with a LD being suspended. The research required for the study helped me to improve my professional practice as a special education teacher and a leader in the field of special education. Through the time-consuming journey of scholarship, I have gained a tremendous amount of knowledge concerning the implementation of evidence-based

interventions to support teachers in the inclusive classroom. I hope to use the experience to make my contributions to assist with preventing students from having disruptive behaviors in the inclusive classroom.

Project Development and Evaluation

The development of this project began with a purpose. The purpose of my study was to examine and gather information regarding the implementation of the PBIS and how the application supports local students identified with a LD receiving excessive suspensions due to their disruptive behavior. This purpose changed many times throughout the research. There are often circumstances that alter the social and educational evaluation of a phenomenon (Thomas, 2013). The length of time I took to complete each phase of the capstone played a significant role in the revising and revisiting of my point of view. The next stage of development led me to the frame, method, and analysis for this research.

During the preliminary stage, the research regarding various conceptual frameworks led me to Skinner's (1969) and Ross' (2015) theories of development. The conversations with the committee members helped with the selection of qualitative methods. The data analysis for research was driven by the desire to have a study based on validity and merit. After outlining the background and finding a local issue to be addressed, I examined various scholarly peer-reviewed articles relating to students identified with a LD and evidence-based interventions used to help in the inclusive classroom.

Next, questions similar to those highlighted below helped with evaluating the problem at the local school district: What is missing from the available information? and What would be the consequences for not having additional information about the problem with disproportionate levels of suspensions for students identified with a LD? (Thomas, 2013). The systematic research was a method for examining the experiences of the teachers and administrators who support students identified with a LD.

Finally, I developed the following research questions: What do the general and special education teachers feel are the reasons for the high rate of suspensions for students identified as LD at the local school setting?, What do the administrators, including the special education director and the assistant principal, feel are the reasons for the high rate of suspensions for students identified as LD's at the local school setting?, and How do general and special education teachers implement the PBIS model and methods in classroom management in the inclusive setting?. The questions in this study were established to help clarify data from participants. The three research questions led to the examination of the general and special education teachers 'and administrators' perceptions relating to the climate and cultures surrounding the implementation of the PBIS. Additional reviews of the literature happened throughout the research.

Leadership and Change

Change revealed itself with each review of the literature. My goal with the doctoral journey was to become a better leader in the field of special education. What has emerged during this research process was the love for knowledge. My role as a lifelong learner and a leader continues to be achieved as I apply myself to the extended

plan. The linear plan of questions, literature review, methods, and analysis opened the door to new questions with a continued cycle referred to as a recursive plan (Thomas, 2013). Throughout the research process, I investigated, revisited, and revised while examining the world around educated stakeholders that are invested in the success of students identified with a LD. A change in leadership will be demonstrated as I continue to share my knowledge with the implementation of the project based on the research.

Reflection on the Importance of the Work

The process of gaining access to knowledge to support social change began in the winter of 2015 with the introductory course for the doctoral program with Walden University. The name of the course, "Leading the Future of Education," would be the title of my theme song about the four-year journey. Meeting the goals for the outlined courses has given a great deal of insight into the field of special education. The course work and capstone process have helped establish a work ethic that offers my community knowledge about the changing world, communication skills to make command decisions, and problem-solving ability to repair multifaceted issues.

The outcome from the capstone is the proposed project to assist the teachers and administrators at the local elementary school with theories and practices to improve the classroom setting. The project offers essential components to support an already motivated group of educators. The proposed project has the potential to stimulate a professional learning community occupied by shared knowledge and a drive for excellence. The message behind the professional development is grounded on strategies to amplify aptitudes to improve the implementation of evidence-based models that will

support the student in the inclusive classroom. The goal is to strengthen the foundation at the local school and decrease the number of suspensions. I plan to share my knowledge with the teachers and administrators so the students will have access to an inclusive class that can impact the educational journey in a positive fashion. This project study can be used by those educators interested in helping students identified with a LD in the inclusive classroom.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

This project's applications are based on my interpretation of the perceptions of general and special education teachers and administrators. Understanding there is a potential for bias based on my experiences, I used the information from the interview transcripts and notes to formulate the plan for the project. I have an ethical responsibility to these participants as the research may have an indirect or direct implication for the lives of others (Nakkula & Ravitch, 1998). The methodological choices I have used for this research have kept the participants' values and meaning a priority. The qualitative approach to this study provided general and special education teachers and administrators an opportunity to share the knowledge that may potentially support future research.

Future research based on this particular study could involve additional methods for data collection. Enhancement might take place if a researcher also utilized observations and peer focus groups. Observations are an optimal method for data collection in the field of inquiry. The notes from the observations and focus groups could be used to triangulate the interview responses. Ravitch and Carl's (2016) explanation of the qualitative study involves research that consists of a set of interpretations. By adding

observation and focus groups, the researcher may have additional data to consider. Based on the local phenomenon, other topics for data collection may include parent and family supports, technology as an intervention, and outside interventions. A mixed-methods study that has a combination of interviews, focus groups, observations, and a review of local data may catalyze change for the local elementary school in this field of study.

Conclusion

There continue to be behaviors in the inclusive classroom that are detrimental to the learning environment. Eventually, general and special education teachers rely on exclusionary consequences to change the problematic circumstances. The purpose of this study was to gather perceptions of general and special education teachers and administrators about the recent implementation of the PBIS. The data from the elementary school revealed a need for additional training to support the application of methods relating to PBIS. The data also disclosed other positive classroom management models that seem to be isolated to specific classrooms. The teachers and administrators of the elementary school offered versions of evidence-based interventions employed by individual teachers, but not all. The inconsistency and the variation in determination for excellence in the school may be a contributing factor to the high levels of suspensions for students identified with a LD.

The participants' level of willingness to share information about the phenomenon demonstrated a commitment to the purpose. The plan for professional development and the integration of a PLC might help the teachers and administrators carry out the evidence-based strategies at a higher level of intensity to support the students identified

with a LD in inclusive classrooms.   My role as a facilitator to promote positive change

will be to share the project with the district leadership team. Expectations for the

collaborative forum includes producing a plan for implementing a version of the project

located in Appendix A.

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Appendix A: The Project

The genre chosen for the project is a three-day Professional Development. An outline below gives an overview of the proposed project. The targeted audience is the general and special education teachers from the local elementary school in a rural southern state.

The purpose of this professional development is to provide three days of instruction to general and special education teachers regarding training the trainer, student mentoring, and PBIS tier I, II & III. The goals of this project were established based on the data collection, which focused on a need to provide a collaborative forum. Additionally, the proposed goal will assist the local elementary school with joining forces to expand the systems in place to support the students in the inclusive classroom.

The proposed learning outcomes will establish an environment that embraces the components of a professional learning community. The stated goals include: gaining a better understanding of the evidence-based strategies to enhance the inclusive classroom, strengthening the collaborative strategies between general and special education teachers and augmenting an ongoing plan for leadership, which will address the disproportionate number of suspensions for students identified as LD.

Daily Schedule

Implementation Schedule:

Professional Development

Day 1: Training the Trainer:

Time: 8 am – 3 pm for all general and special education teachers

Duration: 7 hours

Day 2: Student Mentoring:

Time: 8 am – 3 pm for all general and special education teachers

Duration: 7 hours

Day 3: PBIS Tier I, II & III:

Time: 8 am – 3 pm for all general and special education teachers

Duration: 7 hours

Daily Agenda

Day 1 Training the Trainer

8 am – 8:30: Breakfast

Presentations

Resources needed: a laptop computer and smart TV

8:30 – 10:30: Team Building Activity

- Name Game

- Passing Crossed or Uncrossed

10:30 – 11:30: Demographics of Our District

- Computers (online search)

11:30 – 12:30: Lunch

12:30 – 1:30: Amplify Change with Professional Capital

- Breakout session

- Activity: Sharing perceptions

1:30 – 2:00: Excellence in the AIR-Accountability, Integrity, and Respect

2:00-2:30: Enlist the Power of the Group

- Q & A

2:30 – 3:00: Closing

- Evaluation

Day 2: Student Mentoring

8 am – 8:30: Breakfast

Presentations

Resources needed: smart TV

8:30 – 10:30: Team Building Activity

- Mirror Image
- Getting There on Time

10:30 – 11:30: Three Big Ideas of a PLC

11:30 – 12:30: Lunch

12:30 – 1:30: Instructional Approaches that Can Help Support Extension Lessons

- A Focus on Learning (Video)

1:30 – 2:30: 16 Elements of Explicit Instruction

- Q & A

2:30 – 3:00: Closing

- Evaluation

Day 3: PBIS tier I, II & III

8 am – 8:30: Breakfast

Presentations

Resources needed: Computers and Smart TV

8:30 – 10:30: Team Building Activity

- I've Got the Beat
- The Almost Infinite Circle

10:30 – 11:30: The Foundation of SMART Goals

11:30 – 12:30: Lunch

12:30 – 1:30: Websites to Assist with PBIS Implementation
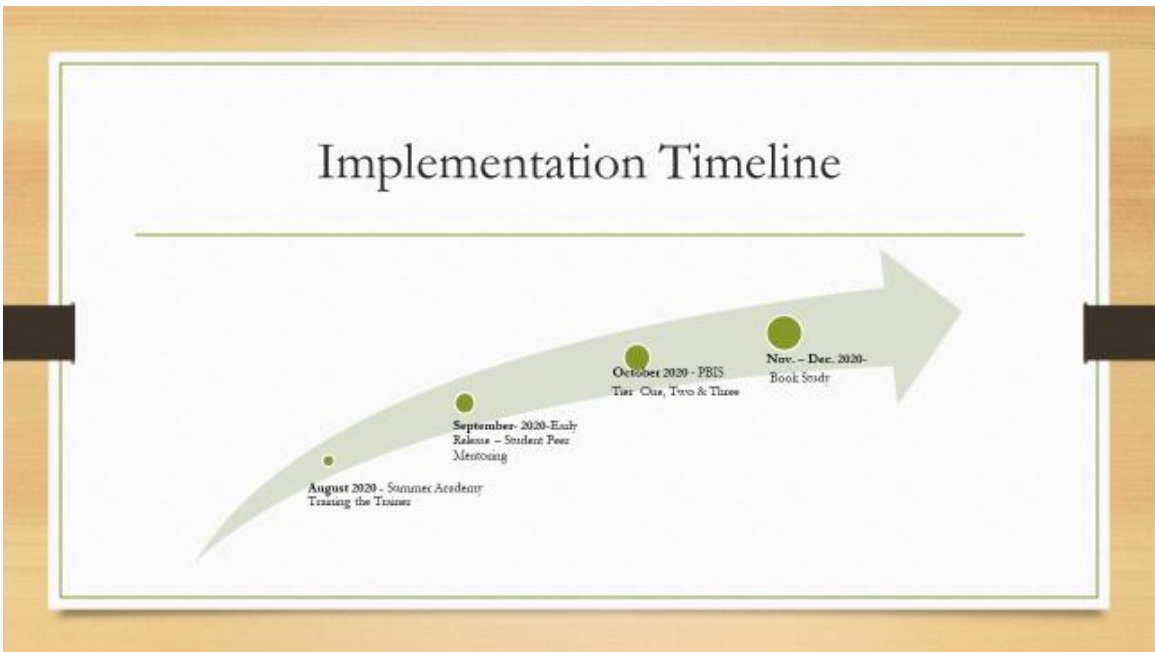
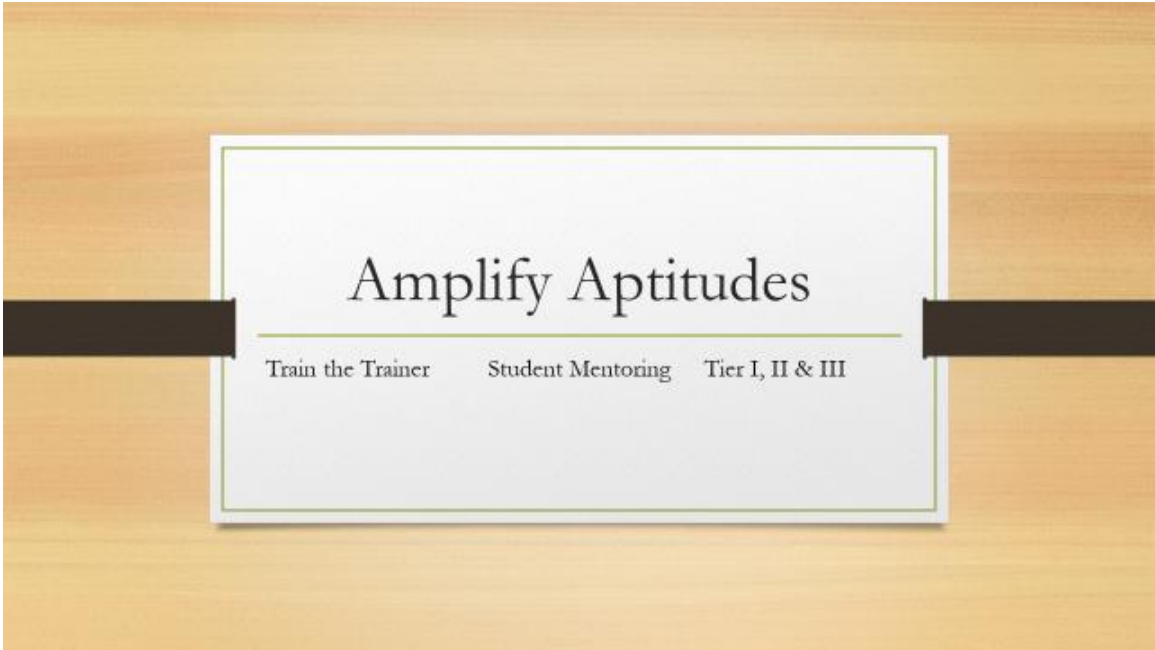Computers

1:30 – 2:30: Continue Data Collection

PBIS Self-Assessment Survey (SAS)

- Q & A

2:30 – 3:00: Closing

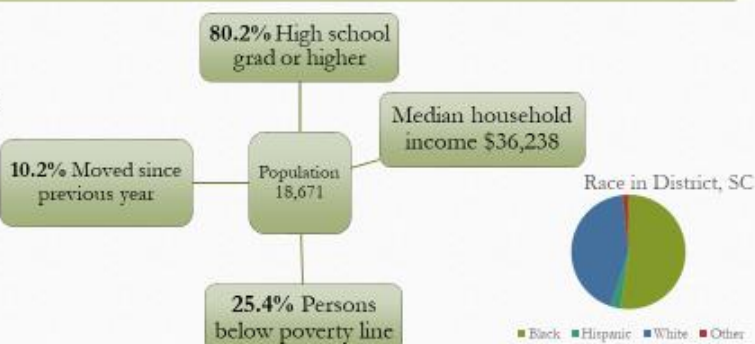- Evaluation

The PowerPoint Presentation

Day One
August 2020- Summer Academy Team Building

- Training the Trainer
    - Demographics of the District, SC
    - Amplify Change with Professional Capital
    - Excellence in the AIR - **A**ccountability, **I**ntegrity, and **R**espect
    - Enlist the Power of the Group
    - Let the Group Change the Group
    - A Focus on Learning
    - 8 Elements of Explicit Instruction

Demographics of Our District, SC

80.2% High school grad or higher

Median household income $36,238

10.2% Moved since previous year

Population 18,671

25.4% Persons below poverty line

Race in District, SC

■ Black ■ Hispanic ■ White ■ Other

Amplify Change with Professional Capital

- Professional learning that increases the educators effectiveness
- Professional learning that raises the results for all students
- Professional learning that applies research on change
- Professional learning that sustains support for long term

Fullan, 2015

Excellence in the **AIR**
Accountability, **I**ntegrity, and **R**espect

Enlist the Power of the Group

- Human capital - by gathering information from the teachers using the classroom experiences
  - Ask questions to gain social resources such as:
    - How often and to what extent do teachers in your school collaborate to improve learning in the classroom?
    - What types of resources and supports are in place to assist with students that exhibit disruptive behaviors in the inclusive classroom?
    - PBIS has been implemented to assist a school-wide social reform in supporting students' academic growth. What are the positive interventions in place to influence students' success in your classroom?

Let the Group Change the Group

- We need the general and special education teachers to change each other for the better.
- Principals will act as facilitators of teachers success rather than instructional leaders (Leana, 2011).
- The Leadership will be in place to help the general and special education teachers organize as a group for change by asking questions:
  - What combination of factors will maximize the teachers learning and therefore improve success for most students learning (Fullan, 2016)?

September 2020- Early Release monthly PD

- Cooperative Professional Learning Community (PLC)
  - Beat the odds
  - Less than 34% of educators report that they engaged in a collaborative cultures (Weatherby, 2013)
  - The plan for the schools empowerment involves educators working collaboratively in recurring cycles using the "Three Big Ideas of a PLC (Roberts, 2019)."

Three Big Ideas of a PLC

1. **A focus on learning**: DuFour et al. (2016) explain, "The fundamental purpose of the school is to ensure that all students learn at high levels (grade level or higher)" (p. 11).

2. **A collaborative culture and collective responsibility**: DuFour et al. (2016) assert, "Educators must work collaboratively and take collective responsibility for the success of each student" (p. 11).

3. **A results orientation: Successful PLCs require a results orientation**. DuFour et al. (2016) maintain, "To assess their effectiveness in helping all students learn, educators in a PLC focus on results—evidence of student learning" (p. 12).

Tier II and III

Zone of Proximal Development

- Vygotsky's (1978) describes the zone of proximal development as the sweet spot where students can maximize their learning.

- Vygotsky's (1978) theorizes that for students to learn at their highest levels, performance relies on a learning environment that promotes:

    - teachers that support them,

    - teachers that check on them,

    - students understand that adults will ensure they are doing what's needed to succeed in school (Roberts, 2019).

Instructional Approaches that can be Helpful in Supporting Extension Lessons

Flexible Grouping

- A description of flexible grouping allows for students to work with a peer of similar academic ability and performance level (Tomlinson & Allan,2000).

- Flexible grouping brings students together.
    - When using flexible grouping, separation from the whole class is temporary. Use "Grouping Planner) Appendix F (Hockett & Kristina, 2019)

- Flexible grouping exposes students to new and divergent perspectives.
    - Flexible grouping pushes students out of their comfort zones and into interactions with classmates they might not otherwise get a chance to learn from.

- Flexible grouping combats status differences.

    - Purposeful grouping communicates powerful messages to students from the teachers about their roles in the classroom community.

Roberts, 2019

A Focus on Learning

- Watch Anita Archer talk about how and when to use explicit instruction.
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i-qNpFtcynI&app=desktop

Novice learners and Struggling learners

Learners with acquired knowledge and skills

Explicit instruction

Discovery

Archer, 2019

First 8 Elements of Explicit Instruction

1. Focus instruction on critical content.
2. Sequence skills logically.
3. Break down complex skills and strategies into smaller instructional units. Teach in small steps.
4. Design organized and focused lessons.
5. Begin lessons with a clear statement of the lesson's goals and your expectations.
6. Review prior skills and knowledge before beginning instruction.
7. Provide step-by-step demonstrations.
8. Use clear and concise language.

Archer & Hughes, 2011, p. 2-3

Second 8 Elements of Explicit Instruction

1. Provide an adequate range of examples and non-examples.
2. Provide guided and supported practice.
3. Require frequent responses.
4. Monitor student performance closely.
5. Provide immediate affirmative and corrective feedback.
6. Deliver the lesson at a brisk pace.
7. Help students organize knowledge.
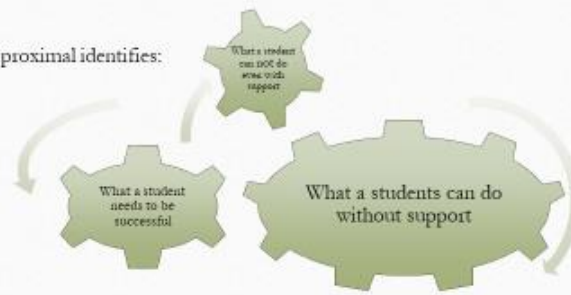8. Provide distributed and cumulative practice.

Archer & Hughes, 2011, p.2-3

Day Two
2020-Early Release – Student Peer Mentoring

- Zone of Proximal Development
- Challenges and Increased Social Rejection
- The Power of Social Exchanges
- Supporting the Struggling Students

115

Zone of Proximal Development

The zone of proximal identifies:

What a student can NOT do even with support

What a student needs to be successful

What a students can do without support

Roberts, 2019

Challenges and Increased Social Rejection

- Students with academic deficits are more likely to be rejected by peers.
- Both strong and poor experience loneliness and social rejection (Morgan, Farkas, & Wu (2012).
- Students with a learning disability are more likely to be bullied by their peers (Cummings, Pepler, Mishna, & Craig, 2006; Sideridis, Antoniou, Stamovlasis, and Morgan (2013).
- Bullying that disrupts learning hinders the development of skills.
- Disruptive behavers that stop academic instruction may happen in the hallway or cafeteria (McIntosh, Ty, & Miller, 2014).

The Power of Social Exchanges

- The power of social exchanges with students
- Offering an opportunity to close the social gaps
- Ensuring peer grouping includes a target with academic learning

- Make groups
- Develop a list of positive social exchanges
- Share

Supporting the Struggling Students

- Use learning extensions that have common experiences and lead to higher levels of learning.
- Place the student in social situations with peers, which may help maintain engagement.
- Create higher learning connection that improve students' outlook on school.

Roberts, (p. 82).

Setting Goals for Student Peer Mentors

- Effective goal setting addresses:
- Inside and outside influences
- Lesson planning and activities
- Conversation about the mentoring programs:
  - setting,
  - recruitment,
  - and ongoing training.

Dubois & Karcher, 2014

Day Three
October 2020 - PBIS Tier I, II & III

- Continue Data Collection
- The Foundation of SMART Goals
- Websites to Assist with PBIS Implantation
- Evaluations and Data Collection

5%

15%

80%

Our Goal
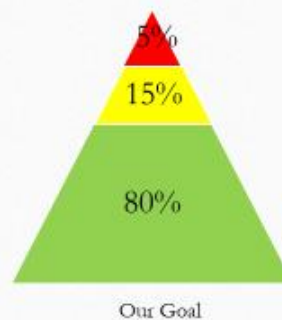
Continue Data Collection

- Review the data from the PBIS Self-Assessment Survey (SAS)assessment to assess the quality of implementations for the individual student, each classroom, the non-classroom settings and school-wide.

- Review the Benchmarks for Advanced Tiers (BAT) Tiers 2 and 3 PBIS systems action plan.
  - Identify the clear SMART goals and trajectories for skill development in areas of academics and social and emotional growth (McIntosh, Frank, & Spaulding, 2010).

The Foundation of SMART Goals

- **Tier 1** goals are intended to be universal, for all individuals
  - Set goals to support and prevent a particular condition from occurring.
- **Tier 2** goals are intended for students who may be at an increased risk for contracting particular conditions.
  - Set goals to reduce the chances of individuals contracting the condition.
- **Tier 3** goals are used with individual students who have already contracted the condition.
  - Set goals to lessen the effect (or symptoms) of the condition, or if possible cure it.

Gordon,1983

Websites to Assist with PBIS Implantation

- This cite provides the Blueprint that includes an outline for a PBIS program.
- The cite also partnered with the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports to provide free tools for implementation and training.
  - www.pbis.org

- These two cites will offer hands on experiences, tools, and examples for implementing PBIS
  - www.pbismaryland.org
  - miblisi.org

Evaluations and Data Collection

- Follow-up with evaluations to provide guidance and selection of effective interventions and future assessments.
- Establish evaluations used as a source of data regarding the fidelity of practice and implementation.
- Create evaluations to guide the integration process.
- Review sample evaluations.
- Develop a time line for meetings, evaluations, and surveys.

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Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Thank you for helping by answering the interview questions. The purpose of the study is to understand the perceptions of general and special education teachers and administrators, including the special education director and the assistant principal, to gain more in-depth information regarding local students identified as learning disabled (LD) receiving a disproportionate number of suspensions due to their disruptive behavior and whether or not the recent implementation of the PBIS has behavioral outcomes that influence students with a LD. This questioner is for teachers and administrators. Answer questions based on your role in the district. Thank you.

1. Describe yourself as an educator.
2. What are the positive interventions in place to influence students' success in your school/classroom?
3. What type of reinforcement procedures and/or preventive punishment are in place?
4. How are positive social exchanges, reinforcement procedures, and preventive punishment strategies used in your school/classroom?
5. How does the school's staff development annual training/action plan foster positive social exchanges/classroom management?
6. It is the role of the educator to develop classroom management system that fosters a safe and healthy learning environment. How do educators in inclusive classrooms help students feel secure and safe?
7. The inclusive classroom combines general and special educations students. How does the inclusive classroom foster academic commitment?

8. The school's atmosphere is affected by the climate and culture of the school. How would you describe the climate and culture of your classroom? How would you describe the climate and culture of the school?

9. Does your school have a formal structured plan detailing the interventions of PBIS? Comment on the recent implementation of the PBIS tier system of support.

10. What resources or strategies are in place at your school students identified with a learning behavior who exhibit disruptive behaviors in the inclusive classroom.

11. What recommendations would you offer to a new teacher about working with students in the inclusive class?

12. Every classroom faces challenges. Describe any obstacles you have recently encountered as you worked with students in the inclusive classroom. How did you overcome the challenges?

13. What types of home to school resources and supports are in place to assist students that exhibit disruptive behaviors in the inclusive classroom?

14. How are educators using PBIS and other evidence-based practices to manage the functioning of students with LDs to decrease suspension rates?

15. Please tell me about some areas you would like further training.