

2020

## Emotional Behavioral Disability Students: How Emotional-Social Intelligence Empowers Mainstream Elementary Teachers

Christopher J. Hanna  
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# Walden University

College of Education

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Christopher J. Hanna

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University

2020

Abstract

Emotional Behavioral Disability Students: How Emotional-Social Intelligence

Empowers Mainstream Elementary Teachers

by

Christopher J. Hanna

M.Ed., California State University of Pennsylvania, 2018

MBA, Robert Morris University, 1989

BS, Robert Morris University, 1983

Dissertation Submitted in Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

August 2020

## Abstract

A district in Southwestern Pennsylvania was experiencing disruptive behaviors with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in the elementary mainstream classroom. Grounded in the Bar-On 10-factor structure emotional-social intelligence model, the purpose of the study was to gain understanding of how emotional-social intelligence competency empowered regular-education teachers to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities. The qualitative naturalist-constructionist research approach involved implementing the responsive interview technique for data collection. The study involved purposeful sampling for participant recruitment for 10 elementary regular-education teachers. The elementary teachers who taught first through fifth grades were observed by their building principals as maintaining positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities and recommended to be invited to participate in the research study. Participants were teachers who had a minimum of 5 years of elementary regular-education experience with students with emotional behavioral disabilities. Data analysis was achieved through a 5-step simple qualitative research design. Multiple coding cycles involving a priori, and in vivo coding facilitated the identification of three emergent themes from participant responses for 10 semi-structured questions. The three themes were: (a) social emotional learning in the classroom, (b) expectations for classroom behavior and instructional goals, and (c) positive teacher-student relationships. The results of this study suggest that elementary principals may increase instructional minutes in the mainstream classroom through emotional-social intelligence professional development to enable teachers to maintain mutually satisfying relationships with student with emotional behavioral disability.

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## Dedication

I would like to dedicate my dissertation to my spouse, Paul W. Boyle Jr. His encouragement, patience and motivation strengthened my determination during my times of self-doubt and exhaustion. No one has ever provided me with such feelings of love and security. Without him, the accomplishment of attaining my doctoral degree may have never transpired. Also, I dedicate this dissertation to my golden retriever, Maxwell and my Old English Sheepdog, Hanna. I so appreciated the numerous hours that each laid faithfully under my desk as I worked. They assured that I was never alone. This has been a period of personal and academic growth that will continue for the duration of my lifetime. I thank everyone who encouraged me.

## Acknowledgments

Above all, I want to acknowledge and thank my first chair, Dr. Andrew T. Alexson. Words cannot express the gratitude that I feel for the time and effort that he expended guiding me through this journey. He provided constant academic and personal support throughout this difficult process, for that I will always be indebted. Thank you all very much for inspiration, guidance, and encouragement. I would like to acknowledge Dr. Anita Dutrow for the time and effort that she spent reviewing my work. Her suggestions assisted greatly in making my dissertation a better product. Finally, I would like to extend my appreciation to my participants. Their professionalism, honesty and willingness to share their experiences enabled me to obtain significant insight into the importance of emotional-social intelligence and its influence on maintaining positive teacher-student relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

A district in Southwestern Pennsylvania was experiencing disruptive behaviors from students with emotional behavioral disabilities in the elementary mainstream classrooms. District principals observed that regular-education teachers who valued and promoted positive teacher-student relationships had minimal disruptive behaviors from students with emotional behavioral disabilities in the mainstream classroom (elementary principal, personal communication, June 6, 2019; elementary principal, personal communication, July 20, 2019; assistant elementary principal, personal communication, August 1, 2019). It was the consensus of the research site's elementary principal group that teachers who were adept at maintaining positive teacher-student relationships displayed emotional-social intelligence competencies. Conversely, teachers who did not maintain positive relationships with students lacked empathy, displayed daily stress, and were inflexible in terms of classroom management procedures. This qualitative study involved purposeful sampling of 10 regular-education teachers from a district in Southwestern Pennsylvania to explore how emotional-social intelligence competencies empowered regular-education teachers to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in the elementary mainstream classroom.

The U.S. Department of Education regulations implementing the Individuals with Disabilities Educational Act (IDEA) of 2004 regulations required public schools to educate children with disabilities, to the maximum appropriate extent, with their nondisabled peers. This federal regulation mandating the least restrictive environment (LRE) for students with disabilities increased the population of students with emotional

behavioral disabilities in the mainstream classroom. Teachers have expressed difficulties in terms of classroom management and appropriate instructional environments for such a diverse populace of special needs students in the mainstream classroom. Teachers have criticized their administration and lawmakers for the unresponsiveness to the student behavioral and academic challenges endured in the mainstream classroom. Regular-education teachers asserted that building principals have neglected to provide them with the appropriate human and material resources to manage students with special needs.

According to Gidlund and Bostrom (2016), students with emotional behavioral disabilities prove to exhibit the most difficult behavioral challenges to regular-education teachers in the mainstream classroom. Students with emotional behavioral disabilities manifest behaviors that regular-education teachers find difficult to understand and manage. The purpose of this study is to understand how emotional-social intelligence competencies empowered regular-education teachers to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in elementary mainstream classrooms. Positive social change will result when school administrators have awareness of the benefits of enhancing emotional-social intelligence competencies. My study found that social-emotional intelligence competencies empowered teachers to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities. Increased emotional-social intelligence competency in all teachers may lead the teachers' ability to maintain mutually satisfying relationships with all students with emotional behavioral disabilities. Students who maintain mutually satisfying relationship with their teacher have exhibited

preferred social and academic behaviors that have extend instructional minutes in the mainstream classroom at the district site.

Mutually satisfying teacher-student relationships have created a classroom environment where students with behavior challenges learn to interact socially to bond with both their classroom teacher and peers (Poulou, 2017). Mutually satisfying relationships are characterized by teacher-student communication and the teacher's ability to understanding and meet the student's emotional and academic needs. The complexity of daily interactions between teacher and student requires the teacher to possess emotional-social intelligence and intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies. Professional development can provide for emotional-social intelligence attaining emotional-social intelligence competency. Increased emotional-social intelligence may lead to more positive teacher-student relationships and increased preferred student behaviors, and instructional engagement (Bahia, Freire, Amaral, & Teresa-Estrela, 2013; Breeman et al., 2015; Poulou, 2017; Poulou et al., 2018).

Individuals who have high self-regard and emotional self-awareness have the ability to understand emotions of themselves and others, maintain mutually satisfying relationships, effectively manage stress, and adapt to changing environments (Bar-On, 2006). Individuals possessing these emotional-social intelligence competencies are more prepared to maintain positive relationships with their students (Poulou, 2017). Students with emotional behavioral disabilities have more difficulties sustaining relationships with their teachers than their nondisabled peers (Breeman et al., 2015; Gresham, 2015; Gidlund, 2018). Negative behaviors increase when students feel disconnected from their



classroom teacher and peers (Gidlund, 2018). Conversely, negative behaviors diminish when students feel secure in the classroom environment and accepted by their teachers (Cook et al., 2018; Poulou et al., 2018). Regular-education teacher who participated in research studies exploring relationships between teachers and students with special needs indicated that teachers who did not possess adequate emotional-social intelligence competencies had difficulty bonding with emotional behavioral disabilities students (Breeman, Wubbels, Van Lier, Verhulst, van der Ende, Maras, & Tick, 2015; Gidlund, 2018). Regular-education teacher participants in the Swedish study performed by Gidlund (2018) acknowledged that inconsistent behaviors and aggression of students with emotional behavioral disability was a barrier to maintaining positive teacher-student relationships. My research in a district in Southwestern Pennsylvania explored how emotional-social intelligence competencies empowered regular-education teachers to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in the elementary mainstream classroom.

### **Background**

A district in Southwestern Pennsylvania was experiencing disruptive behaviors from students with emotional behavioral disabilities in elementary mainstream classrooms. District principals observed that teachers who valued and promoted positive teacher-student relationships had minimal disruptive behaviors (elementary principal, personal communication, June 6, 2019; elementary principal, personal communication, July 20, 2019; assistant elementary principal, personal communication, August 1, 2019). It was the consensus of the building principals at the research site that teachers who were

adept at maintaining positive teacher-student relationships displayed emotional-social intelligence competencies. Conversely, teachers who did not maintain positive relationships with students lacked empathy, displayed daily stress, and were inflexible with classroom management procedures. This qualitative study explored how teachers maintain positive student relationships with emotional behavioral disability student grounded in the Bar-On 10-factor structure emotional-social intelligence model.

Special education laws mandate the LRE for students with disabilities. This increased the population of students with emotional behavioral disabilities in mainstream classrooms. Gidlund and Bostrom (2016) explored the difficulties that regular-education teachers confront in the mainstream classroom in terms of classroom management and appropriate instructional environments for such a diverse populace of special needs students. Additionally, these same teachers criticized both building principals and lawmakers for their unresponsiveness for providing support in the mainstream classroom to adequately provide the human and material resources to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Regular-education teachers participating in the Gidlund and Bostrom study asserted that administrators have neglected to provide them with the appropriate resources and professional development to manage students with behavioral challenges. Additionally, the participants viewed government proponents for inclusion as detached and idealistic to assume that special needs students can assimilate into the mainstream classroom environment without adequate teacher training and human resources.

According to Gidlund and Bostrom (2016), students with emotional behavioral disabilities prove to be among the most difficult challenges to uninterrupted instruction in

the mainstream classroom. The research of Gidlund and Bostrom suggested that students with emotional behavioral disabilities occupy both the teachers' profession and private thoughts to a large extent. The participants expressed that they were frequently consumed with developing new approaches to adapt as a teacher to these students. Students with emotional behavioral disabilities manifest behaviors that teachers find difficult to understand and manage. Many times, teachers are unprepared for challenges associated with emotional behavioral students. Most participants in the Gidlund and Bostrom study blamed themselves when a student failed. They asserted that the culture of their school district considered it be the teacher who failed when he or she could not manage a student.

The purpose of this study is to understand how emotional-social intelligence competencies empowered regular-education teachers to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in elementary mainstream classrooms. Positive social change will result when school principals implement professional development that increases teachers' emotional-social intelligence competency. Enhancing emotional-social intelligence competencies may enable all regular-education teachers to maintain the same positive teacher-student relations with emotional behavioral disabilities as the participants in this study. My study suggested that teachers who possess social-emotional intelligence competencies have the ability to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities.

## **Problem Statement**

Teacher-student relationships play an important role in terms of student behavioral adjustment. Disruptive student behaviors manifest as a result of a weakened teacher-student relationships (Poulou, 2017). The problem was that it was unknown how emotional-social intelligence competencies empowered regular-education teachers to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in elementary mainstream classrooms.

Bar-On (2006) asserted that interpersonal interactions are mutually advantageous when individuals possessed strong intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies. Poulou (2017) found that teachers who possess emotional-social intelligence competency cope more constructively with conflict compared to their colleagues who do not possess emotional-social intelligence competency. For my study, the Bar-On 10-factor structure emotional-social intelligence model served as the conceptual framework. The Bar-On 10-factor structure emotional intelligence model consists of four meta-factorials that include: (a) intrapersonal emotional-social intelligence component, (b) interpersonal emotional-social intelligence component, (c) stress management emotional-social intelligence component, and (d) adaptability emotional-social intelligence component. The four meta-factorials are further subdivided into 10 competency factors: (a) self-regard, (b) interpersonal relationships, (c) impulse control, (d) problem solving, (e) emotional self-awareness, (f) flexibility, (g) reality testing, (h) stress tolerance, (i) assertiveness, and (j) empathy. Each competency supports the foundation of emotional-social intelligence. Individual competencies will be explored to understand how emotional-social

competencies empowered regular-education teachers to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in elementary mainstream classrooms.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the research study was to gain understanding of how emotional-social intelligence competencies influence the empowerment regular-education teachers to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in elementary mainstream classrooms. My participants were teachers employed at a district in Southwestern Pennsylvania who had maintained positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in the elementary mainstream classroom resulting in limited behavioral disruptions. Participants' data were analyzed within the context of the Bar-On 10-factor structure emotional-social intelligence model and served as the conceptual framework for my research study. This qualitative research study adhered to a naturalist-constructionist qualitative approach to develop the data collection instrument, conduct the data collection, and guide the data analysis process. The naturalistic research approach was conducted by the tenets of social construction. My findings can be shared with building principals at the research site and similar districts to enhance emotional-social intelligence competencies of regular-teachers in the elementary mainstream classrooms who have been unable to establish the same quality relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities as the participants in my study.

### **Research Question**

The research question for the study was intended to help identify the Bar-On 10-factor structure emotional-social intelligence model competencies that effectively influenced regular-education teachers to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities.

*RQ:* How do emotional-social intelligence competencies empower regular-education teachers to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in elementary mainstream classrooms?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The Bar-On 10-factor structure emotional-social intelligence model was used as the conceptual framework for this study. It is an adapted version of the Bar-On 15-factor emotional-social intelligence model. The competency factors are inclusive of 10 highly interrelated competencies and skills. Bar-On (2006) asserted that individuals may increase their emotional intelligence competency through professional development training. Emotional-social intelligence training provides for (a) understanding one's own emotions and expressions of feelings, (b) understanding others' emotions, (c) controlling emotions, and (d) adeptness for solving problems. Additionally, Bar-On asserted that emotional-social intelligence can be enhanced through professional development in a relatively short period of time to a limitless extent. Increasing emotional-social intelligence competency may assist regular-education teachers with maintaining positive student relationships.

Data collection was performed through 10 semi-structured open-ended interview questions. Semi-structured interviews permitted participants to fully communicate their experiences and perceptions regarding the phenomenon. Data analysis revealed commonalities in terms of perceptions and experiences among the participants in the study regarding how emotional-social intelligence competency empowered regular-education teachers to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in mainstream classrooms.

### **Nature of the Study**

I used a naturalist-constructionist approach for my qualitative study. The naturalist-constructionist approach is a proven research design for exploring how people perceive their world and interpret their experiences. The approach is appropriate when the researcher wants to experience what something feels like or how it works from the inside (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The naturalist-constructionist approach involved exploring the research participants' perceptions and experiences of the phenomenon to obtain thick, detailed rich data. The study data collection involved how participants perceive their world and interpret their experiences. A basic tenet of the constructionist approach to social research is that individuals construct their own realities based upon their experiences and interpretations of these experiences.

Qualitative interviews involved thick, detailed rich perceptions and experiences regarding the phenomenon using multiple data sources. Semi-structured interview abided by the responsive interviewing technique. The responsive interview technique provides inquiry flexibility to delve deeply into participant insights and the permits the researcher

the adaptability to change course quickly when unexpected events occur. Transcriptions were produced from the recorded interviews and annotations documented the subtle nuances during the interview process that were not evident in the participant's dialogue. The data were member-checked for transcription accuracy.

### **Definitions**

*Emotional-behavioral disability:* A condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance. The child exhibits (a) an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors, (b) an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers, (c) inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances, (d) a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression, and (e) a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems (IDEA, 2004)

*Emotional intelligence:* The aspect of human intelligence that governs humans' ability to recognize, understand, control, and use emotions in terms of solving problems of a personal and interpersonal nature (Bar-On, 2006).

*Emotional-social competency:* Overall capability or capacity for emotional-social behavior (Bar-On, 1998).

*Emotional-social intelligence:* Interrelated emotional and social competencies, skills, and behaviors that determine how well humans understand and express themselves, understand others and relate with them, and cope with daily demands, challenges, and pressures (Bar-On, 2006).



*Inclusion:* Students receiving instruction in general education with the necessary specialized supports and services (Kaweski, 2011).

*Interpersonal Competency:* The ability to be aware of others' emotions, feelings, and needs, and establish and maintain cooperative, constructive, and mutually satisfying relationships (Bar-On, 2006).

*Intrapersonal competency:* The ability to be aware of oneself, understand one's strengths and weaknesses, and express one's feelings and thoughts nondestructively (Bar-On, 2006).

*LRE:* To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not disabled. Special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (IDEA, 2004).

### **Assumptions**

The following assumptions were made about the study. All of the teachers who participated in the study believed that positive teacher-student relationships benefited the classroom environment. It was an assumption that the participants provided honest feedback regarding their experience and perceptions, gave thoughtful reflections before answering the question. Additionally, it was an assumption that participants would have the best interests of students as their focus and that they possessed emotional-social intelligence competency.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The scope of the study was limited to two elementary schools in the same district that have issues with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in elementary mainstream classrooms. Criteria for participation were selected based upon discussions with elementary principals employed at the research site. These building principals were the primary resource for inviting the most qualified individuals to participate in the study. The administrators selected participant candidates who they deemed as distinguished or proficient for maintaining positive relationships with students. It was required that each participant had a minimum of 5 years of regular education classroom experience. A participant group including regular-education teachers exhibiting an inability to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional-behavioral disabilities was considered; however, it was believed that the most thick, detailed-rich data would be obtained from a participant group who were observed as maintaining positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in the elementary mainstream classroom.

Six female teachers and four male teachers participated in the study. All 10 of the research participants had earned master's degrees in education. Five participants provided instruction in the K-3 elementary building and five participants provided instruction in the fourth- and fifth-grade elementary building. Saturation was reached after the ninth interview; however, a tenth interview was conducted to explore the possibility of obtaining new information. After the tenth interview, it was decided that further interviews would not provide additional insights.

### **Limitations**

Generalizability is limited due to the purposeful sampling of 10 participants. Fourteen teachers were identified 14 as distinguished or proficient in terms of maintaining relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities, and saturation was achieved after 10 interviews. Data collection was conducted using semi-structured interviews. A focus group format was considered for data collection. An advantage of a focus group would have been the participants' ability to build upon the experiences of each other in the group. Sharing information regarding the same topic is central to a focus group's success. However, there are barriers to this type of interview format. Some more timid participants may have been reluctant to express opinions contradictory to the majority, and information involving sensitive topics would have been difficult to obtain. Several more limitations are present in the study. Transferability may be limited to districts with similar demographics.

The sample population included only elementary teachers from first through fifth grade and were employed at the same research site. A building principal referral bias may exist as participants were selected based upon personal and professional knowledge of the teachers' abilities to maintain positive teacher-student relationships. It was a possibility that each building principal has his or her own definition of positive student relationships. Thus, an inconsistency for candidate qualifications may exist. Such selection of participants may not have accounted for school culture, principal student-behavior tolerance, and teacher popularity. Finally, I may have incorporated bias into the research study based upon my personal experiences and knowledge of elementary regular-

education teachers who have maintained positive relationships in the mainstream classroom with students with emotional behavioral disability. There was possibility that bias existed during data collection and analysis, as opposing participant views may not have been viewed as relevant data. However, I suspended my personal experience knowledge of the phenomenon to minimize any bias during the research.

### **Significance**

The proposed study will expand prior research knowledge pertaining to understanding how emotional-social intelligence competencies empower regular-education teachers to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in elementary mainstream classrooms. To my knowledge, there are no qualitative research studies that explored how emotional-social intelligence competencies empowered regular-education teachers to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in mainstream classrooms.

Emotional intelligence competency has been identified as an important factor that enables teachers to have positive relationships with their students. According to Bar-On (2006), “Emotional-social intelligence is an array of interrelated emotional and social competencies, skills and behaviors that determine how well we understand and express ourselves, understand others and relate with them, and cope with daily demands, challenges and pressures” (p. 3). My findings can be shared with administrators who value enhancing emotional-social intelligence competencies among regular-education teachers who have been unable to establish the same quality relationships with students with emotional behavioral disability.

My study will positively affect social change through increasing the emotional-social intelligence competency of regular-education teachers in the mainstream classroom. The results of this study suggested that regular-education teachers who have emotional-social intelligence competency maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities. The positive teacher-student relationships are characterized as being mutually satisfying. Students who maintain a mutually satisfying relationship with their teachers have reduced behavioral disruptions and increased instructional engagement.

### **Summary**

The study involved the qualitative naturalist-constructionist approach to extend building principals' and regular-education teachers' understandings of how emotional-social intelligence competencies empower regular-education teachers to maintain positive student relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in mainstream classrooms. The naturalist-constructionist approach involved exploring the research participants' perceptions and experiences of the phenomenon to obtain thick, detailed rich data. I identified the study's problem and purpose stemming from regular-education teachers' needs in mainstream classrooms of two elementary schools in a district in Southwestern Pennsylvania. The Bar-On 10-factor structure emotional-social intelligence model was chosen as the conceptual framework for the study as it was inclusive of emotional and social intelligence competencies, traits, and characteristics. This framework supported the objectives of this research study based upon relevant prior

research linking emotional-social intelligence competencies to positive teacher-student relationships.

Emotional-social competency is essential for a teacher to understand emotions. Understanding one's own emotions is the prerequisite for understanding the emotions of others (Bar-On, 2006). A teacher's inability to maintain positive teacher-student relationships with students with emotional behavioral disability in the mainstream classroom has been problematic at the research site. My study extends the importance of benefits obtained through enhancing emotional-social intelligence competencies.

Chapter 2 includes comprehensive examinations of teacher-student relationship and the influence that teacher emotional-social intelligence competency has on student behaviors. The literature review focuses on the history of emotional intelligence, three models of emotional intelligence, Bar-On 10-factor structure emotional-social intelligence model, teacher challenges with emotional behavioral disabilities, and teacher-student relationships. Chapter 3 includes my research design method selection. Chapter 4 includes data collection and analysis, and chapter 5 includes a discussion of results and findings, future recommendations for studies, and implications for social change.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The problem is a gap in knowledge pertaining to how emotional-social intelligence competencies empower regular-education teachers to maintain positive student relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in the elementary mainstream classroom. The purpose of my study was to gain understanding of how emotional-social intelligence competencies empowered regular-education teachers to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in elementary mainstream classrooms. Insights from my study may be shared with building principals at the research site in Southwestern Pennsylvania and similar school districts who want to improve regular-education teachers' abilities to maintain positive relationships with students under similar conditions. Students with emotional and behavioral difficulties present behavioral challenges that are unique from students without disabilities. Teachers at the research site lack strategies and coping skills to effectively manage persistent disruptions in the classroom.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

My literature review involved electronic databases within the Walden University Library. The resources included Education Source, ERIC, Google Scholar, ProQuest, SAGE Journals, Taylor and Francis Online, and Thoreau Multi-Database Search. Key words driving the research study were: *adaptability, challenging behavior, constructionist approach, emotional intelligence, emotional-social intelligence, emotional intelligence theories, emotional behavioral disabilities, emotional intelligence training, inclusion, intrapersonal, interpersonal relationships, mainstream classroom,*

*naturalistic approach, professional development, stress management, teacher-student conflict, teacher competence, teacher social-emotional competence, teacher-student conflict, and teacher-student relationships.* Primary literature was published between 2016 and 2020. Secondary references and seminal works involving emotional-social intelligence were in some cases published earlier.

## **Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variable**

### **Conceptual Framework/Theoretical Foundation**

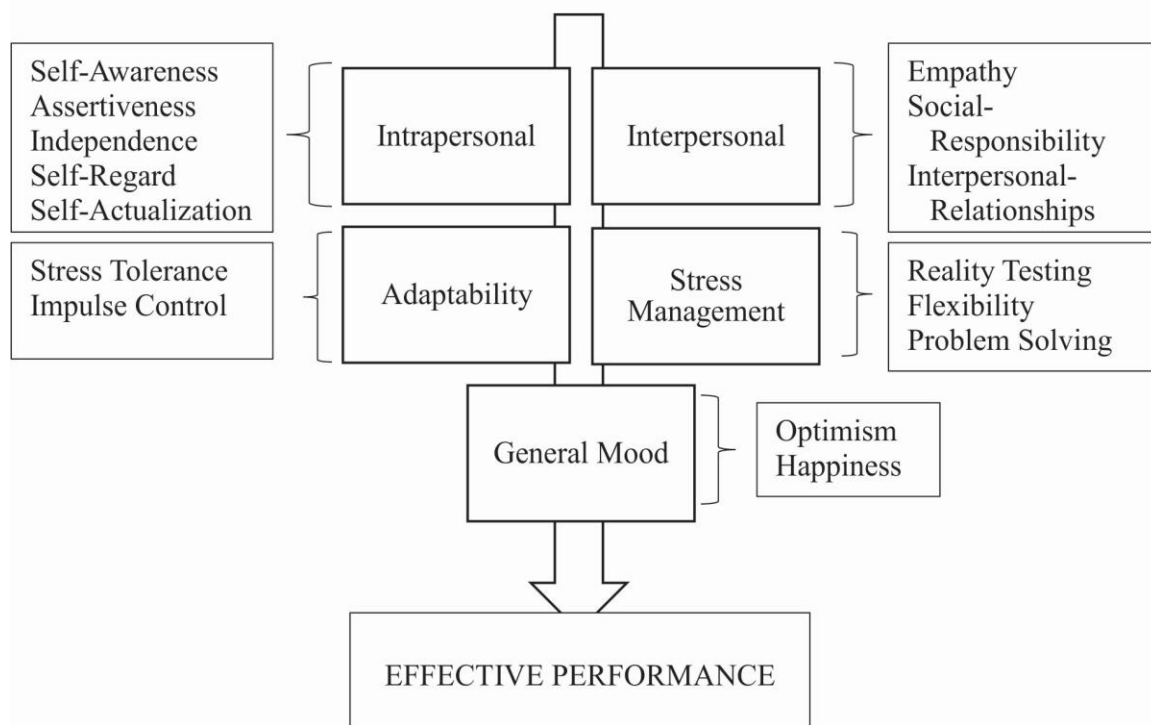
The goal of this research was to understand how emotional-social intelligence competencies empowered regular-education teachers to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in mainstream classrooms. The Bar-On 10-factor structure emotional-social intelligence model served as the conceptual framework for this study.

Bar-On (2006) said that there were significant overlaps among many of the emotional intelligence theories. Bar-On referred to four stages of research inquiry: (a) identifying key factors related to effective emotional and social functioning, (b) defining these factors as clearly as possible, (c) constructing a psychometric instrument of measurement, and (d) norming and validating the measurement instrument across cultures. The Bar-On theory of emotional-social intelligence is grounded in the belief that cognitive and emotional intelligences have equal influence on one's general intelligence. Together, the two intelligences represent a person's potential to succeed in life.

Bar-On (1998) developed his original 15-factor structure emotional-social intelligence model consisting of five meta-factor components. The five meta-factor



components and their related competencies are: intrapersonal social-emotional intelligence component (self-regard, emotional self-awareness, assertiveness, independence, and self-actualization), interpersonal social-emotional intelligence component (empathy, social responsibility, interpersonal relationship), stress management social-emotional intelligence component (stress tolerance, impulse control), adaptability social-emotional intelligence component (reality-testing, flexibility, problem-solving), and general mood social-emotional intelligence component (optimism, happiness). The model comprises the ability to: (a) understand and express our own emotions, (b) understand the feelings of others and relate with people, (c) control emotions, (d) manage change and solve problems, and (e) generate positive mood and express ourselves as displayed (See Figure 1).



*Figure 1.* Bar-On 15-Factor Structure of Emotional-Social Intelligence Model

### **The Bar-On 10-Factor Structure Emotional-Social Intelligence Model**

The original Bar-On emotional-social intelligence model was composed of five meta-factorial components and 15 factor competencies. The 15-factor competency model was challenged as the most effective model for measuring emotional-social intelligence by the appearance of problematic factors. The analysis suggested that an alternate 10-factor structure emotional-social intelligence model would adequately serve as the theoretical basis. The confirmatory factor analysis excluded the problematic factors of independence, self-actualization, optimism, happiness, and social responsibility. Independence was excluded because most of its items loaded on the assertiveness factor. self-actualization, optimism, and happiness were excluded because most of their items loaded on the self-regard factor. Finally, social responsibility was excluded because of its high correlation with empathy. The results of the second analysis suggested that it was empirically and theoretically acceptable to use the Bar-On 10-factor structure emotional-social intelligence model as an alternative to the Bar-On 15-factor structure model. As shown in Table 1, the Bar-On 10-factor structure emotional-social intelligence model comprises: (a) self-regard, (b) interpersonal relationships, (c) impulse control, (d) problem solving, (e) emotional self-awareness, (f) flexibility, (g) reality testing, (h) stress tolerance, (i) assertiveness, and (j). empathy. While Bar-On (2006) asserted that the reliability of his model is strongest using the 15-factor structure of his emotional-social intelligence model, he affirmed that the 10-factor structure is both empirically feasible and theoretically acceptable as an alternative model.

Table 1

*Bar-On 10-Factor Structure Emotional-Social Intelligence Model*

## Components and Competencies of the Bar-On 10-Factor Structure

Components	Competencies and Skills
<b>Intrapersonal</b>	<b>Self-Awareness and Self-Expression</b>
Self-Regard	To accurately perceive, understand, and accept oneself.
Emotional Self-Awareness	To effectively and constructively express one's emotions and oneself.
Assertiveness	To Effectively and constructively express one's emotions and oneself.
<b>Interpersonal</b>	<b>Social Awareness and Interpersonal Relationships</b>
Empathy	To be aware of and understand how others feel.
Interpersonal Relationship	To establish mutually satisfying relationships and relate well with others
<b>Stress Management</b>	<b>Emotional Management and Regulation</b>
Stress Tolerance	To effectively and constructively manage emotions.
Impulse Control	To effectively and constructively control emotions.
<b>Adaptability</b>	<b>Change Management</b>
Reality-Testing	To objectively validate one's feelings and thinking with external reality.
Flexibility	To adapt and adjust one's feelings and thinking with external reality.
Problem Solving	To effectively solve problems of a personal and interpersonal nature.

### **Bar-On Model of Emotional-Social Intelligence Conceptual Framework**

Bar-On (2006) asserted that emotional intelligence cannot stand alone without the inclusion of closely related social intelligence competencies, skills, and facilitators. The assertion by Bar-On that social-intelligence is an integral element of emotional intelligence contradicts the Mayer, Salovey and Caruso model of emotional intelligence. Mayer, Salovey and Caruso (2002) asserted that emotional intelligence was measured purely by ability and considered social intelligence to be an extension of one's personality and not a measurable intelligence.

The purpose of my research study was to identify the commonalities of experiences and theme the emotional and social competencies that are employed by teachers to maintain positive student relationships. The Mayer, Salovey & Caruso model was not the most appropriate conceptual framework. The model, solely an ability-based construct centered upon a four-branch theory, excludes the importance of social intelligence in the teaching profession. Poulou et al. (2018) asserted that teaching is a highly social profession. Therefore, for my study, the Bar-On 10-factor structure emotional-social intelligence model best represent the conceptual framework to determine how emotional-social competency empowered teachers maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities.

### **Emotional-Social Intelligence Intrapersonal Competency**

Classroom teachers interact with a multitude of individuals during the day. Individuals with emotional and socially intelligence competency are more apt to

communicate effectively in social situations (van der Linden, Pekaar, Bakker, Schermer, Vernon, Dunkel, & Petrides, 2017). Intrapersonal competency is the ability to be aware of oneself, to understand one's strengths and weaknesses, and to express one's feelings and thoughts non-destructively" (Bar-On, 2006, p. 3). Bar-On (1998) asserted that intrapersonal competence is the underpinning for development of interpersonal, stress management, and adaptability competencies. Establishing mutually satisfying relationships, developing stress management coping skills, and adapting to the immediate environment cannot be fully attained until one has fully developed intrapersonal competency.

Grandey and Melloy (2017) said that intrapersonal competency assisted individuals in reducing the pressures of daily work-related demands. Pekaar, Bakker, van der Linden, Born, and Sirén, (2018) asserted that intrapersonal competency permitted individuals to experience greater self-awareness and self-control. Understanding one's own emotions permitted educators to anticipate the actions and reactions of students, thus establishing an emotionally balanced classroom environment limiting student escalation and maintain positive teacher-student relationships (Meyer & Turner 2007; Poulou, 2017; Sekreter, 2019).

**Intrapersonal factor competency.** The first component of the Bar-On model, self-regard, is the ability to accurately perceive, understand and accept oneself. It pertains to one's ability to evaluate personal strengths and weaknesses and to acknowledge one's limitations and aspirational possibilities. When lacking in self-regard competency, one feels inadequacy and inferiority. Frequently, the personal deficiency of self-regard results

in depression, frustration, and the inability to accomplish personal goals. The second component, emotional self-awareness, is the ability to understand and be cognizant of one's emotions. Bar-On (1998) asserted that emotional self-awareness is the most important component of the construct. It has emerged in every definition, description, and conceptualization of an emotional intelligence construct from Darwin to present day. An individual lacking in emotional self-awareness has difficulty understanding and identifying the emotions of others. Those on the pathological end of emotional self-awareness continuum may experience Alexithymia. The third component, Assertiveness, facilitates personal achievement and the ability to actualize one's potential. The three elements of assertiveness entail the ability to express on an emotional level, to express on a cognitive level and the capability to protect our self from exploitation. Individuals with strong aggressive ability have the capacity to express their feelings without aggression, disruption, or abuse. Individuals lacking assertiveness competency may develop psychosomatic difficulties.

### **Emotional-Social Intelligence Interpersonal Competency**

Maintaining positive a relationship with emotional behavioral disability students is a difficult task for mainstream classroom teachers. Empathy and mutually satisfying interpersonal relationships increased positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities (Goroshit & Hen, 2016; Poulou, 2017). Children with emotional and behavioral disabilities typically exhibited less interest in interpersonal relationships and social activities, thus making it difficult for teachers to establish and maintain a positive relationship (Claessen et al., 2017; de Leeuw et al., 2018; Madden & Senior,

2018; Poulou et al., 2018). Bar-On (2006) asserted that possessing interpersonal competency was the ability to “be aware of others’ emotions, feelings and needs, and to establish and maintain cooperative, constructive and mutually satisfying relationships” (p. 4). Individuals with interpersonal competency could exercise restraint during stressful personal interactions, minimizing the risk for relationship damaging interactions.

**Interpersonal factor competency.** The fourth component of the Bar-On model, empathy, is the ability to understand others’ feelings. Empathy and emotional self-awareness are the two most essential competencies of emotional-social intelligence. Empathetic individuals are interested in others and display warmth and caring. When necessary, they can put the needs of others ahead of themselves. Empathetic individuals are characterized as cooperative, trusting, and contributing members of an organization. Conversely, individuals who lack the ability to empathize are unable to experience the emotional needs of others. Their indifference stems from the inability to understand and identify feelings and emotions of themselves. The fifth component, Interpersonal Relationship, is the ability to recognize and to be aware of others’ emotions, feelings, and needs. Interpersonal relationship competence is characterized by the ability to establish and maintain cooperative constructive and mutually satisfying relationships. Individuals who possess interpersonal relationship competence are at ease in their relationships, and are pleasant, outgoing and exhibit warmth. Conversely, individuals lacking in interpersonal relationship competency often have a difficult time connecting with others and an inability to maintain satisfying relationships.

### **Emotional-Social Intelligence Stress Management Competency**

Individuals experience stress when their appraisal of the immediate environment is too emotionally demanding to accomplish the task at hand (Brough, Drummond, & Briggs, 2018). Teaching has been viewed as a profession whose workforce is dependent upon a high level of emotional intelligence for career success and job satisfaction (Sekreter, 2019). Gidlund (2018) investigated the conditions by which teachers experienced stress in the classroom. Under normal classroom circumstances, teachers expressed that they maintained appropriate student behaviors through listening attentively, acknowledging student feelings, and redirecting in a calm voice. However, the lack of effective teacher coping strategies during student conflict resulted in the erosion of the classroom environment and teacher emotional stability. Teaching professionals reported a high level of stress associated with the responsibilities of daily demands when exceeding their levels of social competency (Bar-On, 2006; Parveen, & Bano, 2019; Pekaar et al., 2018; Poulou, 2017; Poulou et al., 2018).

**Stress management competency.** Bar-On (2006) asserted that stress management was the ability “to effectively manage personal, social and environmental change” (p. 4). The sixth component of the Bar-On model, stress tolerance, was the ability to withstand adverse events. This individual had a repertoire of suitable responses and effective coping-skills to use during stressful situations. Their preparedness supported their capacity to be relaxed, composed and face difficulties calmly. Stress management was based on choosing a course of action, implementing suitable solutions,



knowing what to do and how to do it, being optimistic, and a feeling of self-efficacy to control the situation. The person who was adept at stress management persevered by taking control in adverse situations. Anxiety resulted when the task is too demanding. This individual experienced apprehension, irritability, tension, poor concentration, and difficulty making decisions. The seventh component, Impulse Control, was the ability to resist or delay the temptation to act. It was the ability to effectively control emotions for a constructive outcome. As a key component of the Bar-On construct was the understanding of emotions of themselves and those of others. Impulse control was a necessary element to execute conflict resolution. The individual lacking impulse control quickly derailed from establishing mutually satisfying relationships.

### **Emotional-Social Intelligence Adaptability Competency**

Adaptability refers to the ability develop and use strategies to regulate thought, behaviors, and emotion in order to respond to changing and uncertain situations (Collie & Martin, 2016b). Teacher adaptation is dependent upon the innovational classroom behavior influenced by the willingness to reflect upon past strategy implementation (Thurlings, Evers, & Vermeulen, 2015). Adaptability is characterized by the teacher's ability to alter his behavior to meet the demands and challenges of the classroom (Collie & Martin (2016b).

Collie and Martin (2016b) asserted the necessity for a teacher to continually adapt to the changing demands and events in the classroom. Three areas of teacher adaptation were identified as relevant to the proposed research study. Firstly, a teacher must be able to adapt to unexpected situations in the classroom by possessing the coping skills to

manage and regulate emotions of themselves. Secondly, a teacher must prepare for interruptions during instruction. Lastly, a teacher must be receptive to professional learning that integrates new knowledge and strategies to improve the overall environment of the classroom.

**Adaptability competency.** Bar-On (2006) asserted that adaptability is a significant component to change management. Flexibility, accurate perception, and problem solving are the underpinnings of adaptability. The eighth component of the Bar-On model, reality testing, is dependent upon an individual's commitment to remain emotionally connected to the actions and the events that influence our environment. Reality testing is the ability of an individual to objectively assess the situation and employ clarity of perception between what is being experienced internally to what truly exists externally. Individuals with high reality testing competency validate their feelings and thinking against the reality of the external environment. The ninth component, flexibility, enables adapting one's feelings and thinking in new situations. Flexibility permits an individual to adapt to unfamiliar and unpredictable events and actions. The person who is adept has the capacity to adjust to different social environment and be resilient when required to address a rapidly changing environment, realities, or new challenges. Flexibility is a vital characteristic for individuals who must be resourceful, take immediate action, improvise, and show resilience and adaptability in unpredictable and demanding scenarios. A lack of flexibility is characteristic of an individual that is ridged, resists change, and is stagnant in the thinking and behavior. The tenth component, problem solving, is characterized by the ability to define problems and develop effective

solutions. Individuals who are adept at problem solving are methodical, disciplined, conscientious and persevering.

Pennings et al. (2018) explored interpersonal adaptation during daily interactions between teachers and students. They performed a longitudinal study on classroom climate. Their quantitative study included 35 teachers and 746 students in 35 classrooms in the Netherlands. Due to the small body of available knowledge of interpersonal adaptation in the educational setting, the authors substituted testing specific hypotheses with an exploratory, descriptive approach to the question of: “What is the degree and nature of interpersonal adaptation in moment-to-moment teacher-student interaction...” (Pennings et al., 2018, p. 43).

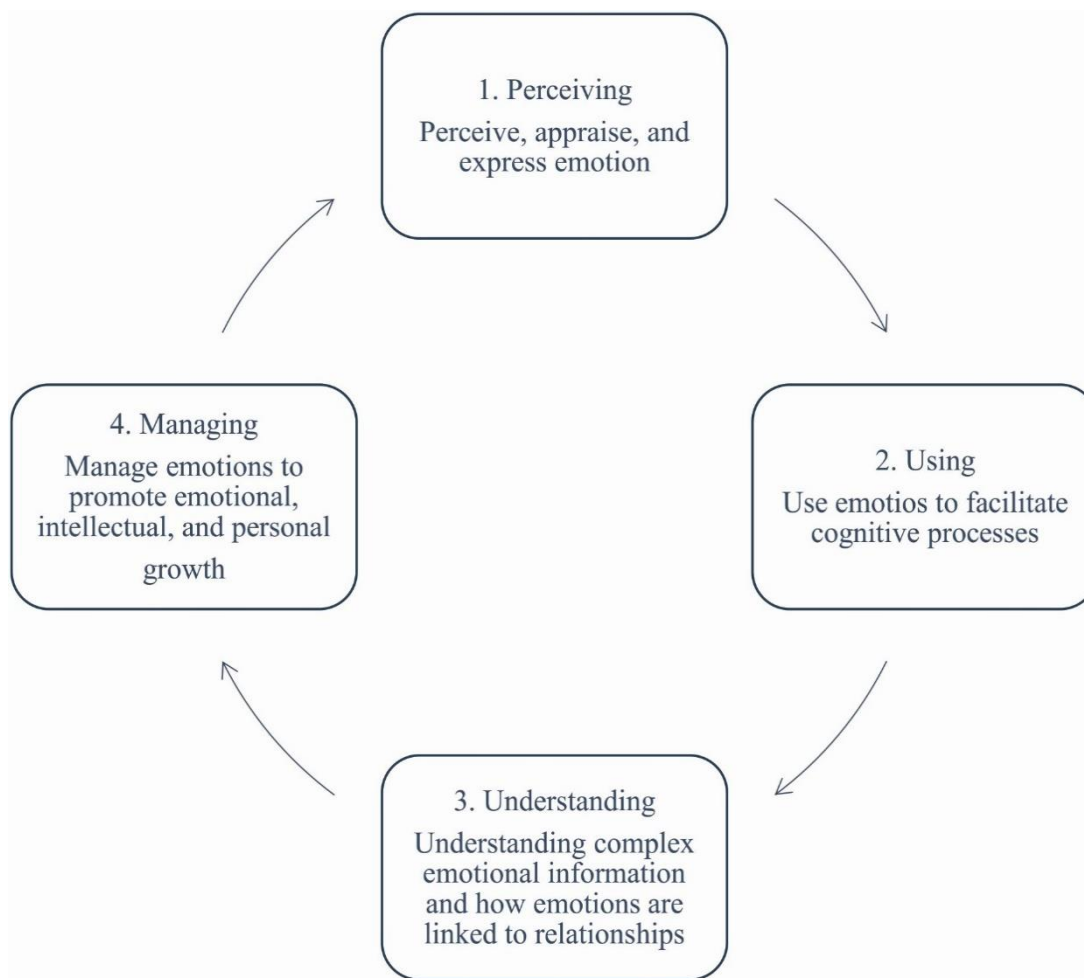
Pennings et al. (2018) concluded that teachers use of agency in the regular classroom resulted in communion by the regular-education student. However, the use of agency with students with emotional and behavioral challenges resulted in an escalated emotional exchange. The student with behavioral concerns responded with heightened agency toward the teacher. Researchers observed that teachers who understood the cyclical nature of a student’s behavior would refrain from responding with hostility and found it more appropriate to respond to student aggression with neutrality or friendliness. The authors suggested additional qualitative research to explore the teachers experiences of friendliness and hostility as defining components of an effective classroom environment.

### **Mayer and Salovey Model of Emotional Intelligence**

Salovey and Mayer developed their first model of emotional intelligence to represent both cognitive and social intelligences. The construct included an amalgamation of personality factors and emotions. The researchers original model comprised three primary abilities: (a) appraisal and expression of emotion, (b) regulation of emotion, and (c) utilization of emotions. Following years of research, Salovey and Mayer concluded that their definition of emotional intelligence was vague. It was limited to the concepts of perceiving and regulating emotions (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Subsequently, Mayer and Salovey narrowed their focus to a pure ability-based model. The revision regarded emotional intelligence as a set of emotional abilities related to information processing (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 2016). The model comprised the following ability criteria: (a) perceive emotions accurately, (b) use emotion to facilitate cognitive activities, (c) understand emotions, and (d) manage emotions.

As shown in Figure 2, the Mayer and Salovey four-branch model is a linear progression of skills arranged from basic to more advanced psychologically integrated processes. Emotional perception is the first branch of the Mayer Salovey model. The linear progression for the branch begins rudimentarily with identifying emotions and feelings in self. The continuum extends to the ability to recognize emotions in others, express emotions accurately, and discriminate between honest, and dishonest expression of feelings. Emotional facilitation of thinking depicted the second branch. It was represented by the ability to prioritize thinking, generate emotions to communicate feelings, and to use emotions in developing cognitive interactions. The continuum built

upon the ability to label and recognize emotions. Attainment of the skills in the last branch required mastery of the lower three branches. Managing emotions ultimately culminated with the ability to manage emotions in self and others to promote personal understanding and growth.



*Figure 2.* Mayer Salovey Emotional Intelligence Model

### **The Goleman Framework of Emotional Competencies**

Goleman's research, with considerable influence from Salovey and Mayer, supported the development of his mixed-model emotional intelligence theory. The

Goleman framework of emotional intelligence has four competencies: (a) self-awareness, (b) social awareness, (c) self-management, and (d) relationship management. The four competencies are categorized as either personal or social competencies (See Table 2). As support of his theory, Goleman (1995) asserted that personal competency is an individual's ability to regulate behavior of themselves through the redirection of disruptive impulses and moods to better enable the pursuance of goals. Social competence is an individual's ability to understand the emotions of others enabling the development of social skills enhancing task resolution. This framework enabled Goleman to identify the differences between an emotionally intelligent worker and an ordinary worker through assessing their personal and social competencies.

Table 2

*Goleman Mixed-Model of Emotional Intelligence*

Goleman's Framework of Emotional Competencies		
	Self Personal Confidence	Other Social Confidence
Recognition	Self-Awareness	Social-Awareness
	Emotional Self-Awareness	Empathy
	Accurate Self-Assessment Self-Confidence	Service Orientation Organization Awareness
Regulation	Self-Management	Relationships Management
	Self-Control	Developing Others
	Trustworthiness	Influence
	Conscientiousness	Communication
	Adaptability	Conflict Management
	Achievement Drive	Leadership
	Initiative	Change Catalyst Building Bonds Teamwork and Collaboration

Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee (2015) suggested that Goleman's emotional intelligence theory when implemented with fidelity could identify outstanding leaders who would propel their organizations to greater success. Goleman continued to refine his research and support his assertions that emotional intelligence has a positive effect on leadership capacity. Goleman (2005) suggested that possibly 80% of a leadership expertise is attributed to emotional intelligence competence. This assertion that emotional intelligence overshadows cognitive intelligence ignited criticism from other theorists. Locke (2005) asserted that emotional intelligence was a made-up construct and publicly denounced the theory. Locke asserted that Goleman had misrepresented the importance of intelligence in an organization's strategic planning. Additionally, Locke vocalized that emotional intelligence competency has no implication other than an individual's personal decision to want to acknowledge the emotions of others.

#### Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

##### **Historical Perspectives on Emotional Intelligence**

The social aspect of intelligence has been investigated for more than a century. Darwin (1872) suggested that animal species would have a greater likelihood of survival with effective use of their emotions. He encouraged the formation of a common language to describe the animals' observable emotions. Thorndike (1920) suggested that one's intelligence was composed of "varying degrees of different intelligences" (p. 228). Thorndike identified three inter-independent abilities of human intelligence: (a) abstract (b) mechanical, and (c) social. Abstract intelligence enabled one to think both verbally and symbolically. Mechanical intelligence enabled the manipulation of objects and

control of bodily actions. Social intelligence enabled communication, and the ability to understand and perform in social relationships. Thorndike (1920b) suggested that social intelligence was the skill of understanding and motivating others and enabled interpersonal interactions for intended positive outcomes.

Throughout the twentieth century, social and emotional intelligence was the focus of many theorists. Moss and Hunt (1927) suggested that social intelligence was merely the ability to get along with people. Vernon (1933) defined social intelligence as the ability to get along with other people while relying upon social technique. Social technique was defined as the ability to perceive emotional stimuli in others and respond appropriately. Wechsler (1958) posited that no intelligence test could be valid if emotional factors were not considered. Noncognitive and conative factors of intelligence may either facilitate or inhibit intelligent behaviors. Positive conative factors such as persistence, curiosity, drive, will, and conscientiousness served to facilitate intelligent behaviors. In contrast, negative conative factors such as anxiety, emotional insecurity, impulsivity, and perseveration inhibited intelligent behaviors. Wechsler considered the present-day emotional and social intelligence as an expandable aspect of intelligence.

Gardner (1983) extended the concept of social intelligence formulated by Wechsler in his theory of multiple intelligences. The original theory of multiple intelligence included seven intelligences: (a) linguistic, (b) logical-mathematic, (c) bodily-kinesthetic, (d) musical, (e) visual-spatial, (f) interpersonal, and (g) intrapersonal. Gardner defined interpersonal intelligence as understanding others and acting on that understanding. Intrapersonal intelligence was defined as the ability to understand oneself.



More specifically, intrapersonal intelligence entailed understanding one's perceived actions, knowing the range of one's emotions, perceiving how and why one acts, and the ability to perform in a manner that facilitates goals. Gardner posited that cognitive abilities could not be fully explained through traditional intelligence. Traditional intelligence did not support the recognition of interpersonal intelligence, nor did it recognize intrapersonal competency. The emotional intelligence theories of Bar-On, Goleman, and Mayer and Salovey were highly influenced by the works of Gardner.

### **Emotional Intelligence Controversy**

Emotional intelligence may be the most controversial construct of the social science. Sternberg, Lautrey, and Lubart (2002) commented that, "few fields seem to have lenses with so many colors." (p.3). Locke (2005) posited that emotional intelligence is not adequately defined, has yet to be proven scientifically valid, and a universal measurement instrument has not been developed to distinguish among personality, social and cognitive skills, and abilities. Antonakis, Ashkanasy, & Dashborough, (2009) asserted that the field of emotional intelligence should be abandoned. However, Ciarrochi, Chan, & Caputi, (2000) said that the opposing theories of emotional intelligence tended to be complementary rather than contradictory. While Mayer and Salovey, Goleman, and Bar-On continue to posit their own models' superiority, it is suggested that no theory has been dominant over the others. It is simply the preference of the researcher to choose the construct that best supports his or her investigation objective.

Locke (2005) asserted that the concept of emotional intelligence should be considered an introspective skill. He challenged the emotional intelligence theory of

Mayer and Salovey. Locke challenged the validity and reliability of the ability model. Locke asserted that the ability to monitor one's emotions does not require any special degree or type of intelligence, discriminating between emotions is a learned skill, and that the use of one's knowledge is not an intelligence. Locke asserted that Goleman failed to consider the intellectual aspects of leadership. Locke criticized Gardner and said that "The ultimate motive is egalitarianism: redefining what it means to be intelligent so that everyone will, in some form, be equal in intelligence to everyone else" (pg. 426, 2005). Overall, Locke asserted the emotional intelligence was an invalid concept based upon his position that the definition of the concept is constantly changing, definitions are so all-inclusive as to make the concept unintelligible, and that there is no such thing as actual emotional intelligence.

### **Emotional Behavioral Disability**

Spielberger (2004) asserted that students with emotional and behavioral challenges are characterized as having lower engagement, disregard authority and are frequently indifferent to adult requests for classroom compliance. A combination of poor coping skills and emotional immaturity leads to irrational conduct of students with emotional behavioral disabilities during normal situations (Buttner et al., 2016). Frequent outbursts and disregard of societal norms often caused rejection in social situations and increased the barriers to positive relationships (Buttner et al., 2016; Kaya, Blake, & Chan, 2015). de Leeuw, de Boer, Bijstra & Minnert (2018) asserted that children with emotional behavioral disabilities exhibit challenging internalized and externalized behaviors. Internalized behaviors are characterized by depression, withdrawal, and anxiety, causing

withdrawal from social engagement. External behaviors are characterized by aggression, hyperactivity, and impulsivity. These unpredictable behaviors increased the probability that children with emotional behavioral disorders will have difficult relationships with peers and adults (Johnson-Harris and Mundschenk, 2014).

### **Definition of Emotional Behavioral Disability for Students**

Researchers have attempted to develop a common definition for emotional disturbance since the middle of the twentieth century. Definitions of emotionally disturbance and behavioral disorders were proposed by Kirk, Haring, and Pate. Kirk (1962) proposed that emotional disturbance was not only detrimental behavior to the individual, but to others who shared the student's learning environment. Haring (1963) formulated a more comprehensive definition than Kirk and asserted that emotional disturbance was influenced through organic and environmental natures, or a combination of both. Additionally, Haring believed that emotional disturbance behavior was characterized by several factors, including the inability to (a) learn at the norm of a student's intellectual rate, (b) maintain positive social relationships, and (c) maintain norm acceptable reactions and responses to day-to-day life situations. Similarly, Pate (1963) proposed emotional disturbance was representational of three experiences in the classroom: (a) the child's regular attendance would create a negative atmosphere in the classroom, (b) the classroom teacher would experience undue stress related to the child's presence, and (c) the presence of the child in the classroom would escalate his disturbing behavior. However, the definition by Bowers has been credited with establishing the current definition of emotional behavioral disability. IDEA has virtually employed the

same qualifications of determination for emotional behavioral disability as proposed by Bowers.

### **Emotional Behavioral Disability Definition Controversy**

The definition of emotional disturbance has been scrutinized as being nebulous, and stigmatic. Some believed that the definition for diagnosis of emotional disturbance disability is too comprehensive. Kauffman (2015) criticized the definition of emotional for neglecting to distinguish by definition and symptoms for all of the disturbance disabilities that have been attributed to the umbrella term of emotional behavioral disability. Additionally, Kauffman asserted that the parameters of the definition distorted the ability for more specific diagnoses. Detailed descriptions of emotional and mental health illnesses could provide for the most appropriate student interventions for academic achievement and behavior modification. Emotional behavioral disability encompassed a general acceptance that every child diagnosed under the conditions of the definition was emotionally and behaviorally aggressive. The subjective interpretation of symptoms caused confusion as to the precise manifestation of characteristics that delineate an emotional disturbance from other disabilities that may exhibit similar symptoms.

Emotional behavioral disability permits the over-lapping symptoms of two or more impairments. These impairments should be more precisely categorized to delineate among specific disabilities sharing common symptoms (Gresham, 2014; Mattison, 2015). Algozzine, Schmid, and Connors (2017) asserted that the current system did not recognize socially awkward students as candidates for disability services. The stagnant definition of emotional disturbance remained indistinct and resulted in a disservice to

students who remained socially awkward. As an example, there was no firm line that indicated at which point a student may be identified progressing from sad to depressed, or social awkwardness to chronic anxiety. Furthermore, the all-encompassing definition permitted school psychologists too much freedom for subjective interpretation during the evaluation process.

### **Emotional Behavioral Disability and the Mainstream Classroom**

Students with emotional and behavioral challenges have been characterized as having lower social engagement, disregard for authority, and indifference or defiance for classroom compliance (Gidlund, 2018; Gidlund Boström, 2017). Likewise, poor coping skills and emotional immaturity leads to irrational conduct during routine circumstances (Buttner et al., 2016). Frequent outbursts and disregard of classroom norms created a challenging environment for students with emotional behavioral disabilities to maintain relationships with teachers and peers. This behavior caused social rejection from peers and created a stressful environment for the classroom teacher (Akin et al., 2016; Kaya et al., 2015). Students with emotional behavioral disabilities exhibited challenging internalized and externalized behaviors. Internalized behaviors are characterized by depression, withdrawal and anxiety causing withdrawal from social and academic engagement. The external behaviors are characterized by aggression, hyperactivity, and impulsivity (de Leeuw et al., 2018). Emotional behavioral disability students' unpredictable behavior increased the probability having complicated relationships with their teachers (Johnson-Harris and Mundschenk, 2014). Gidlund (2018) found that teachers experienced difficulty tolerating out-of-seat disruptions, verbal outbursts, and

aggression during seemingly normal circumstances of students with emotional behavioral disabilities.

Regular-education teachers are prone to encounter student conflict with students with emotional behavioral disabilities. Teachers may be ill-prepared for the unpredictable behavior of these students. Teachers have experienced feelings of insecurity and inadequacy to serve the needs of these students. Teacher insecurity and inadequacy has exacerbated negative attitudes and perceptions towards administrators due to their requests for additional resources being ignored (Madden & Senior, 2018; Takala, Hausstattler, Ahl, & Head, 2012).

Gidlund (2018) researched teachers' attitudes towards inclusion regarding students with special needs. Gidlund evidenced that teachers participating in his study were resentful of inclusion, and particularly inclusion of students with emotional behavioral disabilities in the mainstream classroom. Gidlund's qualitative research study utilized a focus group and follow-up interviews to explore regular-education teachers' perceptions of students with emotional behavioral disabilities in the mainstream classroom. The participants expressed that their interactions with the students were difficult, challenging, stressful, and perplexing. The teachers were concerned for their safety and the safety of the other students. Their concern was grounded upon previous incidents that resulted in injuries from the child's emotional outbursts. The lack of support aides and teacher training made the mainstream classroom a difficult setting to provide appropriate instruction and for teachers to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities. The participants asserted that the

mainstream setting was not designed for students who chronically distracted from the learning experience, referencing the numerous lesson plans that were abandoned due to emotional outbursts and student conflict. Most of the participants believed that the mainstream classroom may not be the appropriate placement for students with emotional behavioral disabilities. Large class sizes, a stressful learning environment, and the rigidity of mainstream classroom environment were identified as barriers to student success. However, many educators agreed that the mainstream classroom promoted social development. Additionally, the teachers agreed that inclusion would be beneficial to the overall educational experience of special need's students if adequate human resources were available.

Disengagement of students with emotional behavioral disabilities in academics and interpersonal relationships will continue through grade advancement. Students who have displayed significant oppositional, disruptive, and antagonistic behaviors will be at greater risk of conflict in their future educational experience. (Archambault, Vandenbossche-Makombo. & Fraser, 2017). Ladd and Burgess (2001) asserted that students who exhibit disruptive and aggressive behavior in the classroom are more likely to remain in conflict with their peers and teachers for the duration of their academic experience.

Hind, Larkin, and Dunn (2019).) performed a mixed-methods research study investigating the attitudes of teachers toward students with emotional and behavioral disabilities in the mainstream classroom. The participants included 14 male and 36 female primary teachers. For the qualitative portion of the study, the participants were

given three open-ended questions. The first questions inquired as to the problems encountered when implementing an inclusive environment to children with emotional and behavioral disabilities. The second question inquired as to the supports provided to the mainstream classroom for students. The last question petitioned suggestions to make the mainstream classroom more successful. There were three themes that emerged. Teachers were most concerned about the physical support provided to them in the classroom and the frequency of behavioral interruptions that affected the learning objectives and goals. The study indicated that the success of the regular-education teacher was highly connected to the willingness and attitude to accept students with emotional and behavioral disabilities into the classroom. The last theme identified the need for strategies and consistent training to manage and engage students with emotional and behavioral disabilities in the mainstream classroom. A significant conclusion was that it was more effective for a teacher to nurture and bond with their students through emotional support and empathy, than to attempt to establish the same relationship through pedagogical excellence.

Ideology and reality clash when disruptive behaviors impede the learning experience of the mainstream classroom. Clark, Dyson, and Millward (2018) suggested that an idealistic system would provide everything to everyone. Nonetheless, the reality between inclusion and academic achievement is that special-needs students learn in vastly different styles and time frames. The learning disparity between students with emotional behavioral disabilities and their non-disabled peers continued to be an instructional challenge. Hind, Larkin, and Dunn (2019) found that lawmakers have



contributed to the contentious inclusive environment by omitting educators in the design process for inclusion. The absence of lawmaker and educator collaboration has resulted in minimal ownership of compulsory placement and student instruction by educators. A collaborative effort may have served to promote the educational success of students with emotional behavioral disabilities in the mainstream classroom (Clark, 2018). Gidlund and Bostrom (2017) asserted that teachers expressed resentment towards the privation of legislative influence, inclusion classroom practices, and professional development.

### **Teacher Emotional-Social Intelligence Competence**

The landscape of the regular-education classroom has changed with the inclusion of students with emotional and behavioral challenges. Inclusion has upset the traditional balance between teacher authority and student submission. Students with emotional behavioral disabilities have created conflict in the mainstream classroom through their emotional escalation and a display of disruptive behavior (Breeman et al., 2015). These students are more apt to display negative behaviors during avoidance to social interaction or nonpreferred activities. Student behavioral disruptions strain teacher-student relationships, inhibit instructional goals, and increase teacher frustration, stress, and burnout (Foley & Murphy, 2015; Lee & Chelladurai, 2016). Teachers displaying lower emotional-social intelligence competency have been linked to increased negative teacher-student relationships and increased negative student behavior. (Poulou et al., 2018).

Salovey, Mayer and Caruso (2004) asserted that low emotional-social intelligence may be responsible for poor relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities. Teachers who display characteristics of low emotional-social intelligence

may not have the capacity to understand and manage their own emotions. Thus, they would have minimal capacity to understand and manage the emotions of others. Peebles and Mendaglio (2014) asserted that teachers experience anxiety and stress from unpredictable behaviors of students. Claessens, van Tartwijk, van der Want, Pennings, Verloop, den Brok, and Wubbels (2016) posited that mental exhaustion and stress increase due to the teacher's inability to formulate effective coping strategies to tolerate persistent disruptions from student with emotional behavioral disabilities. Teachers with low emotional-social intelligence competency struggle to maintain student relationships Poulou (2017) insisted that a lack coping skill during stress or conflict may inadvertently result in the educator escalating the situation with the student. Students with challenging behaviors thrived in an environment free from judgment, provocation, and anxiety. Such classroom environments are most easily accomplished by educators that possess traits of high emotional-social intelligence.

### **Teacher Stress in the Mainstream Classroom**

The challenging behaviors of students with emotional behavioral disabilities continue to increase teacher stress (Mérida-Lopez & Extremera, 2017). When stress increases beyond the limit of manageability, the teacher may experience burnout, anxiety, or declined self-esteem (Gidlund & Bostrom, 2017; Hofenbeck, 2017; Jennings, 2015; Lee & Chelladurai, 2016). Teachers lacking emotional-social intelligence competency may not be capable of sustaining emotional clarity nor the ability to provide adequate emotional attention to student needs and work-related tasks (Foley & Murphy, 2015).

Bar-On (2006) asserted that stress occurs when an individual can no longer cope with the demands of the immediate environment. Frequently, it affects perception and reality testing. The inability to manage stress hinders intrapersonal self-efficacy and erodes one's interpersonal relationship competency. Merida-Lopez and Extremera (2017) insisted that emotional exhaustion is responsible for low self-esteem, an inability to provide for needs, a perceived lack of classroom support, and increased frustration; ultimately leading to depression. Overwhelming job-related tasks are credited with educators distancing themselves from their work, experiencing emotional exhaustion, loss of self-confidence, and increased absences.

### **Teacher-Student Relationships**

Increased teacher competency of intrapersonal, interpersonal, stress management, and adaptability has minimized behavioral challenges in the classroom (Kaya et al., 2015; Pekaar et al., 2018; Poulou, 2016a, 2016b, 2017). Frequent student misbehavior, continuous redirection, and intense emotional disturbances contributed to negative teacher-student relationships (Claessens et al., 2017). However, persistent teacher support during these circumstances has positively affected teacher-student relationships (Breeman et al., 2015; Ruzek, Hafen, Allen, Gregory, Mikami, & Pianta, 2016) and significantly contributed to student preferred behavior (Cook et al., 2018). Teachers displaying high emotional intelligence have successfully maintained positive relationships with regular-education students (Poulou, 2017; Poulou et al., 2018). Similar results have been observed among special-education teachers and their students (Breeman et al., 2015). Display of emotional-social intelligence competency remains a constant factor for

teachers who maintain positive relationships with regular- and special-education students (Breeman et al., 2015; Claessens et al., 2017; Madden & Senior, 2018; Pennings et al., 2018).

Emotional-social intelligence competency is characterized by controlling one's emotions, understand emotions of others, resisting impulsive reactions, and adapting both emotionally and behaviorally to a changing environment (Bar-On, 1998; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Individuals who possess high emotional-social intelligence competency successfully maintain mutually satisfying relationships (Bar-On, 1998; Goroshit & Hen, 2016; Goleman, 1995, Mayer & Salovey, 1997). These individuals are adept at understanding emotions of themselves and those of others, having mutually satisfying interpersonal relationships, developing effective coping strategies and adapting to the changing conditions of the environment (Bar-On, 1998; Goleman, 1995; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Teachers who possess the characteristics of high emotional intelligence have fashioned learning experiences that minimized student anger, anxiety, frustration, and sadness (Rodrigo-Ruiz, 2016).

The ability to develop and maintain positive teacher-student relationships is the primary reason why teachers choose the education profession (Veldman, van Tartwijk, Brekelmans, & Wubbels, 2013). Relationships with students thrived when teachers understood the motivation behind student aggression (Buckley & Mahdavi, 2018; Chen, 2016; Taxer & Frenzel, 2015). Some teachers are adept at managing challenging student behaviors, while other find it virtually impossible. The ineffectiveness of classroom management with students with emotional behavioral disabilities has given rise to student

escalation, teacher-student relationship barriers, teacher stress, and loss of instructional time (Archambault et al., 2017; Sekreter, 2019). High emotional intelligence characteristics provide individuals with coping skills to endure stressful situations (Bar-On, 1998; Rooney, 2015). Controlling impulsive, relationship-damaging comments during student redirection reduced further escalation (Chen, 2016; Taxer & Frenzel, 2015). Teachers who controlled their use of confrontational responses during conflict significantly reduced classroom disruptive behaviors (Dolev & Leshem, 2017).

### **Summary and Conclusions**

The literature review focused upon the gap in knowledge that guided my investigation. It was necessary to introduce the historical relevance of emotional intelligence and the theorists that pioneered the initial research to promulgate social intelligence to the status of an integral part of the human experience. Researchers from Darwin through present day, all contributed to the three major conceptual frameworks that are now recognized as legitimate emotional intelligence constructs.

It was necessary to distinguish among the competing constructs of emotional intelligence. The research revealed that the emotional-social intelligence model of Bar-on was the only construct to adequately provide the conceptual framework for my research study. The cross section of interrelated emotional and social competencies, skills, and facilitators provided the most comprehensive framework to understand the phenomenon of study.

I thought it necessary to examine the definition of emotional behavioral disability and the controversy that continues to surround it and the process to diagnosis. One must

understand the disability and the students' displayed behaviors in the classroom to understand the stressful environment that may emerge during teacher-student conflict. The classroom environment is significantly more difficult for a teacher to maintain a positive teacher-student relationship with students with emotional behavioral disability. Research suggested that emotional-social intelligence competency would provide the emotional foundation to support the emotional needs of the teacher in the mainstream classroom. To the best of my knowledge, there were no research studies that explored teachers the effectiveness of social-emotional coping skills to manage their emotional actions and reactions during student conflict. Similarly, I did not find any research studies that explored teachers effective social-emotional coping skills to prevent student escalation. Many research studies concluded that emotional-social intelligence is a necessary competency, but none specifically outlined a path to the successful usage of emotional-social intelligence competencies to maintain positive relationships.

In Chapter 3, I describe the methodology for my research. I discuss the criteria by which participants were selected, semi-structured interviewing as the instrumentation tool, procedures for data collection, and the data analysis plan. Additionally, I address the measures taken to ensure trustworthiness, and the rights and confidentiality of my participants.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

My purpose for this study was to gain an understanding of how emotional-social intelligence competencies empowered regular-education teachers to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in elementary mainstream classrooms. To the best of my knowledge, there has not been a qualitative or quantitative study exploring emotional-social intelligence competencies empowering regular-education teachers to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in elementary mainstream classrooms.

I used the Bar-On 10-factor structure emotional-social intelligence model as the conceptual framework for my study. The model comprised four meta-factorials: (a) intrapersonal emotional-social intelligence component, (b) interpersonal emotional-social intelligence component, (c) stress management emotional-social intelligence component, and (d) adaptability emotional-social intelligence component. The study served to address the gap in research in terms of how emotional-social intelligence competencies empower regular-education teachers to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in elementary mainstream classrooms. The conceptual framework competencies served as the a priori codes for the study (see Table 3).

In this chapter, I outlined the research design, role of the researcher, methodology, methods of data collection, and data analysis process. Ethical issues and procedures used to establish trustworthiness are addressed. A qualitative naturalist-constructionist approach was used to explore the experiences of regular education-teachers to better understand their perspectives. Elementary regular-education teachers from two schools in

the same district in Southwestern Pennsylvania were selected to participate. Building principals were instrumental in identifying qualified participants. The participants referred by their building principals were deemed as distinguished in terms of maintaining relationships during observations and evaluations.

Table 3

*The Bar-On 10-Factor Structure Emotional-Social Intelligence Model Meta-Factorial Components and Competencies*

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Meta-Factorial Components and Competencies

Intrapersonal Meta-Factorial Component

Self-Regard Competency  
Emotional Self-Awareness Competency  
Assertiveness Competency

Interpersonal Meta-Factorial Component

Empathy Competency  
Interpersonal Relationship Competency

Stress Management Meta-Factorial Component

Stress Tolerance Competency  
Impulse Control Competency

Adaptability Meta-Factorial Component

Reality-Testing Competency  
Flexibility Competency  
Problem-Solving Competency

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## Research Design and Rationale

The research design is a systematic map that guides researchers through the process of identifying the research problem, creating the research questions, implementing the data collection, and organizing the data analysis (Yin, 2018). A qualitative approach permits a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Queiros, Faria, & Almedia, 2017). Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how individuals perceive experiences of their world and then construct meaning from their perceptions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

The following research question guided this research study:

*RQ:* How do emotional-social intelligence competencies empower regular-education teachers to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in elementary mainstream classrooms?

I chose the qualitative naturalist-constructionist paradigm to explore and understand the phenomenon under study. The naturalist-constructionist approach is a proven research design for exploring how people perceive their world and interpret their experiences when the data collection process demands the analysis of thick, detailed-rich content and when the researcher wants to experience what something feels like or how it works from the inside (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Individuals construct their own realities based upon their experiences and interpretations. Researchers learn to see the world from perspectives other than their own. The qualitative researcher uses natural settings to attempt to understand phenomena through exploring how people perceive their world and interpret their experiences. My research demanded that the data collection and analysis

process use thick, detailed-rich content. Therefore, this quantitative paradigm was inappropriate for this study.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The qualitative researcher is the primary data collection instrument (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). In qualitative research studies, researchers conduct interviews, review information, and compile and analyze data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I collected data through semi-structured interviews, transcripts, and multiple cycles of a priori and in vivo coding of data. Data were identified, sorted, and categorized according to competencies of the Bar-On 10-factor structure emotional-social intelligence model.

I am an administrator at in an elementary school at the research site in Southwestern Pennsylvania from which participants for the study were not recruited. The participants were recruited from two of the three district elementary school. The university oversight board and research site stakeholders agreed that conducting my study at my location of employment would not obstruct or distract from my professional responsibilities, nor interfere with the data collection and analysis process. Participants were recruited from first through fifth graders in two elementary buildings. It was not anticipated that my study interviews would lead to harm, deception, or ethical concerns for any participant.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) a reflexivity journal or diary involves recording methodological decisions and the reasons for them. It involves what is happening in terms of the researcher's own values and interests. A reflexivity journal was

maintained throughout the research process. A reflexivity journal is valuable and essential to briefly report how one's preconceptions, beliefs, values, assumptions, and position may have come into play during the research process. Maintaining the journal minimized the possibility for biases influencing research conclusions. Collected data were free from personal experiences or knowledge that I possessed regarding the research topic. Interviews adhered to the semi-structured responsive interviewing protocol maximizing thick, in-depth rich data.

The purpose of this research was provided to participant before the interview process. An email invitation was sent inviting each teacher to participate in the study. The teacher who agreed to participate in the research study responded to the email with the words "I Consent." The rights of participant was outlined and explained in the original email invitation document. Participants' confidentiality was assured through the omission of all data that could reveal participant identity or employment. For each interview, the participant was assigned a pseudonym. The transcript copy and digital recording were date and time-stamped, and location of interview was documented. The participant was referred to by his or her pseudonym during the analysis process.

Every interview was conducted in a comfortable and private location. Additionally, the interview was conducted with the door closed and the environment was free from distractions. The interview ranged in duration from 25 to 64 minutes. During the semi-structured interview process, probes and follow-up questions were used to obtain the most thick and detailed rich collection of the data. This strategy was effective when pertinent information was omitted from the initial response. Coding and theming were

shared with disinterested colleagues. They provided feedback on my data collection and analysis process.

### **Methodology**

The methodology was a qualitative research study implementing a naturalist-constructionist approach. Qualitative research seeks to give meaning to a phenomenon by exploring the participant's world (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The participant's actions, beliefs, and interests surrounding the phenomenon are identified and given meaning (Saldana, 2016). The following section, I articulate the populations and sampling strategies, sources of data, instrumentation, and protocol for interviews.

### **Participant Selection**

Participants were elementary regular-education teachers from two elementary schools in a district in Southwestern Pennsylvania. These teachers displayed emotional-social intelligence competency and maintained positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in the elementary mainstream classroom. Building administrators observed that some teachers appeared to be reflective of their actions, displayed self-control during conflict and positive responses to negative student behaviors, possessed effective stress coping-skills, and positively adapted to changing and difficult environments. Teachers manifesting these qualities were deemed as distinguished or proficient for maintaining positive relationships with student with emotional behavioral disabilities in the mainstream classroom. The personal and professional knowledge of building administrators contributed greatly to the selection of the participants. Additional criterion required that each teacher had a minimum of five

years of regular-education classroom experience with emotional behavioral disability students.

Individuals who met the criteria for participation were sent an email inviting them to participate in the research study. Participants replied to the invitational email, requesting participation in the study, with the words “I consent.” Individual who requested additional information about the study were contacted through telephone communication. In the email invitation, participants were provided information as to the purpose of the study, the interview process, and the plan for data analysis. For the use of the research site, a partnership agreement had been provided to the district superintendent (see Appendix A).

Purposeful sampling strategy is utilized when the researcher has knowledge of individuals who would effectively articulate detailed accounts of his or her experiences with the phenomenon. Selected participants were known to have the experience to inform the researcher of their understanding of the phenomenon of study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Purposeful sampling has been the primary sampling method utilized in qualitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016) and was utilized in my research study. It was necessary that the study’s participants had experienced the phenomenon. The study sought to identify the commonalities among their emotional-social intelligence competencies while exploring their perceptions and experiences with the phenomenon.

Patten and Newhart (2017) recommended a sample size between 20 and 50 participants. The authors asserted that a diverse population of participants is the foundation for qualitative research trustworthiness. Bertaux (1981) asserted that the

smallest acceptable sample size was 15 participants. Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) asserted that purposive samples are most commonly used form of nonprobability sampling. The sample size is dependent upon saturation or the point at which no new information or themes are discovered. However, the authors' research indicated that the aim for understand the common perceptions and experiences among a relatively homogeneous group should be accomplished with twelve interviews. The combined teacher population was 34 at the research site. Fourteen teachers were identified as either distinguished or proficient at maintaining positive relationship with students with emotional behavioral disabilities. The sample population of 10 participants was sufficient to reach saturation. The sample population would have been expanded to reach saturation. However, the total population to a maximum of 14 qualified participants.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

The criteria for participant selection relied upon professional knowledge of the building principal of the participant's ability to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in the elementary mainstream classroom. The potential participant was deemed by their building principal as distinguished or proficient for maintaining positive relationships with students. An additional criterion required that each participant had a minimum of five years of regular-education classroom experience. The qualifying participant criteria were affirmed upon discussions with elementary principals and their personal observations. The principals were the primary resource for assuring that the most qualified individuals were being recruited. The stipulation for a minimum of five years of regular-education classroom experience

was considered appropriate to guard against insufficient experience with students with emotional behavioral disabilities. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using a general qualitative five-step process involving a priori and in vivo coding.

There were two elementary school sites that were used to obtain participants. A total of 14 elementary teachers qualify as potential participants. The first research site, School A, provides instruction for 300 students from kindergarten through third grade. Six teachers were categorized as distinguished or proficient at maintaining positive teacher-student relationships by their principals. All potential participants are primary elementary teachers from one of nine self-contained learning environments. The second research site, School B, provides instruction to 500 students in fourth and fifth grades. There is a total of 22 teachers who educate in reading or mathematics. Eight teachers were categorized distinguished or proficient at maintaining positive teacher-student relationships by their principals. Of the eight qualified participants, four deliver reading instruction, and four deliver mathematics instruction to elementary students. Any participant who agreed to participate in the research study or requested additional information was contacted through telephone communication. During the telephone communication, participants were provided information on the study purpose, the interview process, and the data analysis plan.

The data collection phase consisted of one semi-structured interview that had durations ranging from 25 to 64 minutes. The participant chose either an in-person interview or an online virtual interview. Rubin and Rubin (2012) said that a qualitative

researcher must acknowledge his or her experience and personal opinions concerning the phenomenon with the intention to identify possible biases toward the data collection and analysis process. Therefore, I suspended my personal experiences and knowledge of the phenomenon to assure that the data collection and data analysis was not be subjected unintentional or intentional bias by me during the research process. Additionally, I made a conscious effort to limit encouraging or discouraging participant responses through my body language or comments.

The duration of the research interviewing process was three weeks. Ten semi-structured, open-ended questions were used to explore commonalities of experiences among regular-education teachers who maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in the mainstream classroom. A clear and concise question formation was developed without the use of technical terms or confusing language. Qualitative inquiry recommended asking how questions during an interview and permits the use of what questions to better understand the phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2018).

Before interviews, participants were asked if they have any questions, concerns, or needed clarification of the research study process. At the end of the interview the participant was asked if he or she would like a copy of the transcript for his or her review. Prior to the interview, while recording was in progress, I asked the participant if he or she permitted me to record the interview. During the interview, follow-up and probing questions were used to ascertain thick, detailed rich data. I asked for clarification when there is uncertainty of the meaning of the response. Those participants who requested a



transcription of the interview were provided a copy promptly after the interview has been transcribed. The transcript was considered approved if the participant does not respond within a three-day period with requested corrections. I included additional information from two participants after they had requested to provide additional information to the transcript.

### **Instrumentation**

One-on-one semi-structured interview questions served as the data collection instrument. Semi-structured interviews have been the most frequently used data collection tool in qualitative research. Semi-structured interviews have been identified as an effective tool for obtaining in-depth detailed information (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patten & Newhart, 2017). The semi-structured questioning technique facilitated the natural flow of conversation. The inherent qualities of the semi-structured interview technique provided a balanced data collection process. Highly structured interviews inhibit the researcher from the use of probes and follow-up inquiry which increased the likelihood of misunderstandings of perceptions and experiences of the participants by the researcher (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Conversely, unstructured interviews may not provide the boundaries necessary to ascertain commonalities among participants that would provide relevant themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The questions for the interviews were developed by the researcher to gain understanding of how emotional-social intelligence competencies empowered regular-education teachers to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in the elementary mainstream classroom. The Bar-On 10-factor

structure emotional-social intelligence model comprises four meta-factorials and 10 meta-factor competencies. The four meta-factorials are: (a) intrapersonal, (b) interpersonal, (c) stress management, and (d) adaptability. The conceptual framework competencies provided the a priori themes and the foundation for the original interview questions.

District principals assisted in editing the interview questions and was required to sign a confidentiality form to participate in the peer review process (See Appendix B). The principals each interviewed as a participant in the study to obtain his or her perception of the questions focus and effectiveness of extracting thick, detailed rich data. The group discussed the questions effectiveness in a round-table format. The questions were either considered to be acceptable in their current form, reworked for improved focus or eliminated. The final list of 10 questions were held by the panel as appropriate for an in-depth detailed inquiry of the research question and purpose of the research study. However, practice interviews revealed that the question order and phrasings needed further editing. Practice interviewees indicated that the phrasing of some questions was confusing, and the order did not permit a natural flow of the conversation. A revised version of the original questions more effectively extracted rich and detailed thick responses from the participants.

Content validity refers to the appropriateness of the content of an instrument (Denizen & Lincoln, 2005). Content validity measures how accurately the interview questions assess what is to be explored and answered in reference to the research question. The validity of my instrument questions was established through peer review

and practice interviewing. The a priori coding was established by the components of the Bar-On 10-factor structure emotional-social intelligence model.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

The criteria for participant selection relied upon professional knowledge of the building principal of the participant's ability to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in the elementary mainstream classroom. The potential participant was deemed by their building principal as distinguished or proficient for maintaining positive relationships with students. An additional criterion required that each participant had a minimum of five years of regular-education classroom experience. The qualifying participant criteria were affirmed upon discussions with elementary principals and their personal observations. The principals were the primary resource for assuring that the most qualified individuals were being recruited. The stipulation for a minimum of five years of regular-education classroom experience was considered appropriate to guard against insufficient experience with students with emotional behavioral disabilities. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using a general qualitative five-step, a priori and in vivo coding process for responsive interviews.

There were two elementary school sites that were used to obtain participants. A total of 14 elementary teachers qualify as potential participants. The first research site, School A, provides instruction for 300 students from kindergarten through third grade. Six teachers were categorized as distinguished or proficient at maintaining positive teacher-student relationships by their principals. The second research site, School B,

provides instruction to 500 students in fourth and fifth grades. There is a total of 22 teachers who educate in reading or mathematics. Eight teachers were categorized distinguished or proficient at maintaining positive teacher-student relationships by their principals. Of the eight qualified participants, four deliver reading instruction, and four deliver mathematics instruction to elementary students. Any participant who agreed to participate in the research study or requested additional information was contacted through telephone communication. During the telephone communication, participants were provided information on the study purpose, the interview process, and the data analysis plan.

The data collection phase consisted of one semi-structured interview that had durations ranging from 25 to 64 minutes. The participant chose either an in-person interview or an online virtual interview. Rubin and Rubin (2012) said that a qualitative researcher must acknowledge his or her experience and personal opinions concerning the phenomenon with the intention to identify possible biases toward the data collection and analysis process. Therefore, I suspended my personal experiences and knowledge of the phenomenon to assure that the data collection and data analysis was not be subjected unintentional or intentional bias by me during the research process. Additionally, I made a conscious effort to limit encouraging or discouraging participant responses through body language or comments.

The participant interviewing spanned three weeks. Ten semi-structured, open-ended questions were used to explore commonalities of experiences among regular-education teachers who maintain positive relationships with students with emotional

behavioral disabilities in the mainstream classroom. A clear and concise question formation was developed without the use of technical terms or confusing language. Qualitative inquiry recommended asking how questions during an interview and permits the use of what questions to better understand the phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2018).

Before interviews, participants were asked if they have any questions, concerns, or needed clarification of the research study process. At the end of the interview the participant was asked if he or she would like a copy of the transcript for his or her review. Prior to the interview, while recording was in progress, I asked the participant if he or she permitted me to record the interview. During the interview, follow-up and probing questions were used to ascertain thick, detailed rich data. I asked for clarification when there is uncertainty of the meaning of the response. Those participants who requested a transcription of the interview were provided a copy promptly after the interview has been transcribed. The transcript was considered approved if the participant does not respond within a three-day period with requested corrections. I included additional information from two participants after they had requested to provide additional information to the transcript.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

Qualitative data analysis is a continuous, intentional, and systematic scrutiny of data throughout the research processes (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin and Rubin, 2012). Raw data obtained is reduced to clear and convincing answers to the research question.

The analysis process permitted the formation of logical conclusions through data comparison of multiple sources (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The transcript was provided to the participant within 12 hours after the completion of the interview. The participant had 72 hours to review the transcript and request revisions. Member checking did not interfere with the data analysis process. Each participant who requested to member check his or her transcript returned the document within 24 hours after receipt. Additionally, further editing of the semi-structured interview questions was not necessary after the initial editing request by practice interview participants.

Coding is a data management strategy of assigning short descriptions or identifications to the data. The process enabled the research to more readily access the data and find patterns. A priori coding and in vivo coding was utilized in the data analysis plan. According to Saldana (2016), a priori coding is an acceptable data management strategy that enables the researcher's analysis to directly harmonize with the study's conceptual framework to answer the research question. In vivo coding provides the analysis to obtain categories leading to the emergence of themes. Through multiple cycles of the coding process, interview data was identified, coded, categorized and sorted using a priori and in vivo coding processes (Saldana, 2016).

The analysis for responsive interviews involves five sequential steps. The analysis process begins with the transcription and summarizing of each participant interview. The transcript is reviewed, and relevant text evidence is highlighted. The coding cycles identify text evidence, sorts the material according to relevance, assigns codes, and

summarizes the contents of each file. The material is sorted and resorted within each file. The excerpts are compared among the file subgroups. Summarizing and comparing the results of each sorting continues until no new categories emerge. The categories integrate the description from each interviewee until themes emerge. This step is completed until not new themes emerge. Finally, the descriptions are integrated from each interviewee to create a complete picture of the participants' experiences and perceptions of the phenomenon.

### **Trustworthiness**

In a qualitative study, the credibility of the study is dependent upon on the accurate interpretation of the data. The accurate interpretation of the data is dependent upon the trustworthiness and credibility of the researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). Trustworthiness of the data was demonstrated through four elements. These elements include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

#### **Credibility**

Credibility is the demonstration of congruency of the findings with participant reality. It is indicated by the depth and richness of the data and relies upon the believability or truthfulness of the research findings (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002; Shenton, 2004). Multiple data sources captured the dimensions of each participant's personal experience and perspective for maintaining positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in the mainstream classroom. The semi-structured interview was the sole source of data collection. Fontana and Frey (2000) asserted that the in-depth interview was one of the most powerful tools for understanding human

beings and explaining a phenomenon. The researcher's collaboration with research site principals preserved the credibility requirement of prolonged engagement and persistent observation to identify the most qualified participants. Practice interviews were effective in question order organization and question content. Member checking was employed as a quality-control technique. The participants were given the opportunity to review the data collected before the final analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Saldana, 2016). Member checking was applied by the participant's ability to review the transcript before data analysis. Member checking of transcripts and researcher conclusions increased truthfulness, honesty, correctness of data analysis. Similarly, peer debriefings assisted ensured focused and honest data analysis. Peer debriefing permitted the opportunity to review the data analysis and identify researcher biases (Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

### **Transferability**

Ravitch and Carl (2016) described transferability as the context-specific richness of a qualitative study to be applicable in broader contexts. Qualitative research findings can be transferrable to other contexts provided that thick, detailed-rich descriptions of the data and the context have been accomplished in the study. Thick, detailed-rich descriptions provided the research audiences with the necessary information to make comparisons to other contexts. Shelton (2004) asserted that the number of participants included in the study, the data sources, the methods of data collection, and the time period for collecting the data all influenced the quality and transferability research study conclusion. In the current study, the findings may be transferable to regular-education teachers in grades one through five. Further limitations may exist as the participant



selection was dependent upon principal professional knowledge of the participant's ability to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in the mainstream classroom. Such selection of participants may not account for school culture, principal personality, and teacher popularity. The researcher may present unintended biases based upon previous experience and knowledge of the phenomenon.

Transferability may be affected by the philosophical views of emotional intelligence; trait verses mixed-model theories of emotional intelligence. However, Bar-On has extensively tested his emotional-social intelligence theory. The conclusions of Bar-On's research have continued to support the personal development of intrapersonal, interpersonal, stress management, and adaptability competency. Research on teacher-student relationships has concluded that there has been a need to enhance these competencies. Therefore, this research may produce evidence of how emotional-social competencies empower regular-education teachers to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in the elementary mainstream classroom.

### **Dependability**

Dependability is the stability of the data over time and conditions. Qualitative studies are considered dependable when the researcher has a reasoned argument for the collection of data, and the data is consistent with the researcher's argument (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). According to Patton (2015), dependability allowed future replications of the study based upon the utilization of appropriate methods to assure that the process is logical, documented, and aligned to the research question. My study assured

dependability through a thick, detailed-rich description of the research design, implementation, data collection process, and its alignment to answer the research question (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability is the explanation by the researcher for the decisions that were made during the research process. Confirmability of the research study was attained when the researcher demonstrated that the data and the data interpretation have not been influenced by the researcher's imagination, bias, or previous knowledge of the phenomenon of inquiry. The conclusions are solely the result of the experiences and perceptions of the participants (Patton, 2015). In my research study, I assured that the study's findings were based on the participants narratives and not my potential biases from knowledge and experience with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in the elementary mainstream classroom. I implemented three strategies. The first strategy was the employment of an audit trail. I illustrated that the findings are based on the participants' narratives and described how I collected and analyzed the data in a transparent manner. The audit trail explained how the themes justified the empowerment of teachers to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities. During the semi-structured interviews, I recorded annotated notes to memorialize unique and interesting nuances that may not have been evident from a transcript. Finally, I used my reflexivity journal to memorialize thoughts about the process and my rationale for my statement theming. Reflexivity provided acknowledgement of my biases and positions that may influence my research process.

### **Ethical Procedures**

Necessary permissions were obtained regarding site location, participant consent, and the institution review board. Participant personal information was kept confidential and concealed by the use of pseudonyms. The research site is not identifiable. All data collected was securely stored on a password protected secure digital card that will be kept in a locked cabinet in my home office. Similarly, the computer hard drive is password accessible. All electronic devices used during the data collection and data analysis phases will to be solely accessible to the researcher. After the research study has been concluded, the hard drive was erased, and the secure digital card will continue to be the only source of data. All research data will be destroyed after five years. Approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board was obtained prior to beginning the formal participant selection and data collection. Plagiarism was avoided during all phases of the research study.

I was permitted to conduct the study at the district of my employment. However, I was not permitted to use teacher participants from my elementary building of which I am the principal. This eliminated the ethical conflict of power imbalance between the researcher and the participant. The district site superintendent provided a signed partnership agreement form permitting the use of district education facilities and personnel as participants. The participants were recommended by building principals. Through professional knowledge and observation, building principals identified teachers who were deemed distinguished or proficient at maintaining positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in the elementary mainstream classroom.

During the interview, time was allotted to permit the participant the opportunity to ask questions, seek clarification, and comment. A transcription of each interview was developed using a digital recorder and transcription software. The researcher recorded annotated notes during the interview process to memorialize actions and statement nuances that may not be apparent in the transcript. The interview transcripts was shared with the participant to make changes to their narrative.

### **Summary**

In chapter 3, I provided information on the research design and methodology that was implemented for my qualitative naturalist-constructionist study. During my study, I explored the experiences and perceptions of how emotional-social intelligence competency empowered regular-education teachers to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in the elementary mainstream classroom. The study's purposeful sampling population consisted of 10 elementary regular-education teachers from a district in Southwestern Pennsylvania. The interviews occurred both in person and virtually online. Data collection was guarded against inappropriate access and the anonymity of participants was assured through the use of pseudonyms. The data analysis and coding process will be thoroughly explained in the next chapter. I was vigilant to consider the issues of confidentiality, trustworthiness, and ethicality during the data collection and data analysis phases of my research study.

## Chapter 4: Reflections and Conclusions

In Chapter 4, I present the interview process, recording and transcribing of data, two cycles of priori coding, and the final cycle of in vivo coding of interview data. Furthermore, Chapter 4 includes analysis and interpretations of emerging themes from this study. The purpose of my study was to gain understanding of how emotional-social intelligence competencies empowered regular-education teachers to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in elementary mainstream classrooms. The research question that guided my inquiry is:

*RQ:* How do emotional-social intelligence competencies empower regular-education teachers to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in elementary mainstream classrooms?

The research question is aligned with 10 semi-structured interview questions that were representative of Bar-On's 10-factor structure emotional-social intelligence model. The first cycle of coding used the Bar-On 10-factor emotional-social intelligence model competencies from the conceptual framework as a priori codes. This first cycle of coding assured that the text evidence was sorted correctly to the emotional-social intelligence competency. The second cycle of a priori codes isolated and consolidated text evidence that was effective for regular-education teachers to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities. Additionally, the second cycle of a priori coding served to identify categories from the sorted transcript evidence that represented the third-cycle codes leading to the emergence of themes. Finally, the third-cycle codes were analyzed against the Bar-On definitions of each emotional-social intelligence

competency to isolate emerging themes presented through data analysis. Three dominant themes emerged from the data analysis process.

This study identifying emotional-social intelligence competencies may be essential to increasing the ability of regular-education teachers to maintain positive teacher-student relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities. Building principals and regular-education teachers understanding of how emotional-social intelligence competencies empower mainstream elementary teachers to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities may lead to decreasing negative behaviors and increased instructional engagement in the classroom. The ultimate benefit would be to increase instructional time in mainstream classrooms for students with emotional behavioral disabilities. Furthermore, the results of this study may provide information regarding stress management and problem-solving competencies inherent among students with emotional behavioral disabilities in elementary mainstream classrooms. Insights from this study may be shared with administrators to enhance the emotional-social intelligence competencies of teachers who have been unable to establish same quality relationships with students. I received approval to conduct the study from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (approval number: 04-24-20-0525625).

### **Setting**

Data for this qualitative naturalist-constructionist study were gathered using semi-structured interviews. Qualitative interviews offer the researcher the opportunity to obtain thick, detail-rich content about the phenomenon (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Advantages of

semi-structured interviews include the ability to use open-ended interview questions that provide interviewees the opportunity to share their experiences and perceptions.

Additionally, semi-structured interviews provide the researcher autonomy to deviate from the specific set and order of research questions. a rigid format. Probing and follow-up questions enriched interview data collection, providing the opportunity to delve more deeply into the phenomenon under study.

The organizational site of my research had suspended on-campus learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The original data collection plan for face-to-face interviews was expanded to include virtual online conferencing. Five teachers requested face-to-face interviews. The face-to-face interviews were conducted behind locked closed doors free from intrusion and distraction. Each location provided for privacy and participant comfort. The participants and I adhered to Pennsylvania's guidelines for social distancing. Face-to-face interviews were conducted in either my office or the conference room adjacent to my office. The five participants requesting virtual on-line conferencing interview were advised to use a space that was free from interruption. The elementary school conference room adjacent my office and my home office served as the locations for the online virtual interviews.

There were no irregular operations or events that occurred during interviews. However, each participant initiated a brief discussion about the oddity of Pennsylvania's mandated remote learning program during the Corona virus pandemic. Participants were given unlimited time to express their concerns with remote instruction before I attempted

to initiate the data collection process. Once participants appeared to be relaxed, they expressed enthusiastic attitudes toward the commencement of the interview process.

### **Data Collection**

The responsive interview design permits the researcher the autonomy to adapt research questions to extract thick, detailed-rich content from interviewees. It is an advantage of the semi-structured research design that the researcher is not constrained by an otherwise rigid data collection method of structured interviews prohibiting modification of the collection tool and the process. Responsive interviewing provides the flexibility to delve deeply into participant insights and the permits the research the adaptability to change course quickly when unexpected events occur.

There were minor modifications made to the interview process after two practice interviews revealed the original question order was not conducive to obtaining the thickest and most detailed-rich narratives from the practice participants. The question order required the participant to provide intimate information about themselves and their students. I became cognizant that the participant had not been permitted time to organize his thought process and the question order lacked a natural flow. A second concern was the repetitive wording of emotional-social intelligence components was deemed to be confusing and served only to complicate the question meaning. With the collaboration of the practice participants and principal collaboration, the questions were reworded and reorganized. The follow are the final research questions and interview order:



1. I am asking you to remember a time when you reversed a situation of conflict with a student with emotional behavioral disabilities into a positive experience for both you and the student. Tell me about the experience. (problem solving)
2. What emotional-social intelligence components enable you to control the impulse to react in a manner that will damage the teacher-student relationship during teacher-student conflict? (impulse control)
3. During conflict with a student, there is a perceptual reality and an external reality (how one may interpret the conflict in comparison to the actual intensity of the situation), how does your emotional-social intelligence competency enable you to recognize the actual intensity of the situation and react appropriately? (reality testing)
4. How do your expectations of yourself influence the maintaining of a positive teacher-student relationship? (interpersonal relationship)  
  
How do the expectations for your students influence their maintaining a positive teacher-student relationship?
5. What is your approach to repairing a damaged teacher-student relationship after you have exercised your authority during conflict? (assertiveness)  
  
How do you decide when an authoritative approach to negative classroom behavior is the best choice?  
  
How do you decide when a coercive approach is the best choice?

6. What are your personal characteristics and traits that have built your confidence and self-esteem to effectively maintain positive relationships with students with emotional-behavioral disabilities (self-regard)

7. How does understanding your own emotions influence your effectiveness for maintaining positive relationships with students with emotional-behavioral disabilities? (emotional self-awareness)

How does understanding of your students' emotions influence your effectiveness for maintaining positive relationships with students with emotional-behavioral disabilities?

8. How do you use empathy to maintain a positive relationship with a student? (empathy)

What are your limits to empathizing with the student?

9. How do you modify your classroom behavioral expectations for students with emotional behavioral disabilities? (flexibility)

In what ways have you adapted to the behaviors of a student with emotional behavioral disturbance?

10. What is your support system for maintaining stress-tolerance coping strategies?

For example, but not limited to colleague support, exercise, and emotional awareness of themselves. (stress tolerance)

Each participant was sent correspondence to their publicly displayed email account from my Walden University email account. The first research site, School A, provided instruction for 300 students from kindergarten through third grade. Six teacher

participants accepted an invitation to be interviewed from this site. All six research participants continued through completion of the data collection process. School B provided instruction to 400 students in fourth and fifth grades. Six teacher participants accepted the invitation to be interviewed from this site. All six research participants continued through the completion of the data collection process. A total of twelve individuals accepted the research invitation. Two individuals declined their invitation and two participants were not utilized after data saturation had been achieved.

The ten individuals that participated in the interview process responded “I consent” to the invitation email. The words “I consent” were used as their acknowledgment of their participation rights, requirements, and assurances for participant confidentiality; including but not limited to audiotaping, member checking, and data analysis. The consent agreement indicated that a response to the email using the phrase “I consent” was the only necessary documentation for the individual to agree to participate in the study. I replied to each respondent with a follow-up email requesting an interview date and time, and the interview method most convenient for them. The email invitation included the participant consent form providing comprehensive information on the study. The consent form included: (a) an introduction to the study, (b) the purpose of the study, (c) the interview procedures, (d) the voluntary nature of the study, (e) the risks and benefits involved in the study, (f) participant privacy, and (g) contact information for research study questions and concerns. Immediately prior to the interview, the participant was given a brief summary of the study’s purpose, the approximate length of the interview, and the potential use of the research findings. Once digitally recording, I asked

that the participant give his or her permission for the interview be digitally recorded. I explained that the recording would be transcribed, and a copy would be provided to the participant upon request.

In this qualitative study, I conducted one-on-one interviews to collect and analyze teachers' responses and make annotations of nuances in tone and body language during the interview. The interviews utilized ten researcher-developed semi-structured questions exploring how each competency of the Bar-On 10-factor structure emotional-social intelligence model empowered regular-education teachers to maintain positive relationships with student with emotional behavioral disabilities in the elementary mainstream classroom. Each of the ten questions was designed to ascertain the participants' experiences and perceptions that enabled each to maintain positive teacher-student relationships. The questions were prepared in advance and analyzed by a select group of elementary principals employed at the research district. Each interview question was supported by follow-up and probing questions that were applied to extend the inquiry to generate the most thick, detailed rich responses from the participants.

Interview participants were assigned pseudonyms for privacy and data analysis identification. A list of alphabetized pseudonyms was utilized to conceal identity, designate gender, and interview order. The duration of the interviews spanned a time period from 25 minutes to 1 hour and 4 minutes (See Table 4).

Table 4

*Duration of Participant Interviews*

Participant	Duration
Andrew	64 minutes
Bethany	37 minutes
Christina	31 minutes
Deborah	25 minutes
Edward	58 minutes
Francesca	37 minutes
Gracie	40 minutes
Hayden	50 minutes
Isaac	35 minutes
Julia	37 minutes

Six female and four male regular-education teachers participated in the research study. The participants were inclusive of two first-grade teachers, three second-grade teachers, one third-grade teacher, and four fourth-grade teachers and four fifth-grade teachers. The TEMI android application was used for recording and translate participant interviews. The text was subsequently converted into Word documents for coding purposes. A Sony digital recorder containing a removable secure digital card, and a corded microphone provided an additional layer of protection for transcription correctness and a possible TEMI application malfunction. Annotative notes were taken during the semi-structured interview to memorialize those important nuances that may not have been captured in the transcription. At the end of the interview, I asked the participants if there was a need for clarification of any area of the interview. I once again informed them that they had the opportunity to request a copy of the transcript for

member checking purposes. Upon completion of the transcript, I listened to the digitally recorded version of the interview to assure that the TEMI translation was accurate. The final version of the transcription was printed.

### **Data Analysis**

Analysis is a step-by-step process that takes the researcher from the raw data collected in the interview process to the clear and convincing answers generated from the research question (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Qualitative researchers must focus on the unique context, experiences, and perceptions of the participants' narratives (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The data analysis process began with a transcription of each interview. Each participant was assigned an alphabetized pseudonym to represent gender and interview order. Pseudonyms permitted anonymity when quotes were utilized in both the data analysis and results sections of the research study. Member checking served as a validation of interview responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The transcriptions were provided to the participant within 24 hours of their interview. Four participants requested copies of their transcription and two participants offered additional details to include in their interview narrative.

A priori coding was representative of the competencies of the Bar-On 10-factor structure emotional-social intelligence model was implemented for the first cycle in my data analysis process. The coding process assigned meaning to the interview data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The data was organized through thoughtful reflection as the researcher must use caution not to rely upon the coding process as the whole of data analysis process (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The objective of my coding process was to

disaggregate the data into manageable segments and to identify categories and themes (Schwandt, 2014). I began by printing out paper copies of the participant's transcript. Pseudonym were assigned each participant and used alphabetical letters A through J to indicate the gender and interview order. The pseudonyms were necessary to distinguish among the participants when using direct quotes and other responses accurately.

The process of thematic analysis began by highlighting text relevant to the participant's experiences and perceptions with the phenomenon. The highlighting phase of the first-cycle coding identified relevant concepts, beliefs, actions, and ideas aligned to the research study purpose (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Saldana, 2016). The coding process during qualitative research requires identifying, labeling and the organization of data to find patterns and emerging themes (Ravitch & Carl, 2017). The competencies of the Bar-On 10-factor structure emotional-social intelligence model provided the a priori codes for the transcript evidence for both the first and second cycles. The first-cycle coding systematically assigned transcript evidence to the a priori codes defined by the Bar-On definition of each emotional-social competency. The question competency definition was subdivided into descriptive categories. This further analysis during this phase of the coding process determined the most appropriate classification for transcript evidence.

The a priori codes and detailed descriptions served to clearly identify the emotional-social competencies that empowered regular-education teachers to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disorder in the elementary mainstream classroom. The second cycle of coding extended the analysis of the transcript evidence organized according to emotional-social competency and assigned specific and

concise in vivo codes. The progression from a priori to in vivo coding provided for condensed and succinct representation of the text evidence concepts, beliefs, actions, and ideas. During the second cycle of coding, the text-evidence statements were sorted for common categories. Each statement was assigned a category. The second cycle of coding linked teacher transcript evidence establishing categorical codes. The categorical codes were linked to teacher intrapersonal competency, teacher interpersonal competency, teacher adaptability competency, and stress management skills competency. The categorical codes established during the second cycle of coding were representative of the third cycle in vivo codes. The in vivo codes were sorted and summarized. Finally, the five categories were analyzed and three themes emerged (See Table 5).

The emerging themes from the data analysis process included, (a) teachers who maintained positive teacher-student relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities built a classroom community among all learners by providing social emotional learning embedded into the instructional curriculum, (b) teachers who maintained positive teacher-student relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities established expectations for classroom behavior and academic achievement, and (c) teachers who maintained positive teacher-student relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities were committed to establishing mutually beneficial relationships.



Table 5

*Third Cycle Coding: In Vivo*

Codes	Categories	Themes
Communication Community Consistency Impulse Control Manage Stress Social Cues and Body Language Self-Esteem Social Etiquette	Developing student emotional social intelligence	Provides social emotional learning within classroom instruction
Accomplishment Value Confidence Communication Consistency Discipline Empathy Flexibility Honesty Perception Student Expectations	Generating effective communication  Defining acceptable student behaviors and work ethic	Establish expectations for classroom behavior and academic achievement
Communication Consistency Empathy Manage Stress Problem Solving Reflection Respect Trust	Creating stable student relationship foundation  Maintaining mutually beneficial relationships	Fosters positive teacher- student relationships

### Results

The purpose of my study was to gain an understanding of how emotional-social competencies empower regular-education teachers to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in the elementary mainstream classroom.

The results and findings from the study revealed the emergence of three dominant themes

from the data analysis that aligned to the research question and conceptual framework. I used the Bar-On 10-factor structure emotional-social intelligence model as my conceptual framework. Each of the conceptual framework competencies were represented in the semi-structured research questions. The emerging themes were the result of three coding cycles that sorted and categorized the participants' text evidence through both a priori and in vivo coding. All text evidence has been provided using pseudonyms for the study participants. The three themes emerged from the commonalities among the research data. Theme statements were an extension of the emergent themes. The theme statements encompassed teacher traits and characteristics that enabled them to maintain positive relationships with students. There were three commonalities among all themes. Each theme was characterized by teacher traits of communication, consistency, and impulse control. These three teacher traits provided the foundation for the participants' ability to maintain positive relationships with all students. Each theme is presented with the corresponding theme statement. Text evidence supported my analysis leading to the emerging themes.

### **Social Emotional Learning**

Nine participants incorporated some form of social emotional learning into their classroom instruction. One participant did not reference social emotional learning. She focused on student expectations and her ability to form relationships with her students with emotional behavioral disabilities. The nine participants who referenced the use of social emotional learning emphasized their commitment to fidelity of use. Teachers providing social leaning in their classroom enhanced peer communication, action and

reaction impulse control, stress coping skills, body language recognition, and social etiquette. Each expressed that the targeted social emotional learning created a learning environment that fosters a classroom community. Bethany, a first-grade teacher, explained “I feel like I am building a good social foundation especially with the use of songs, like introductions, how to say good morning, how to greet a friend and shake hands, choosing a partner, and the importance of knowing your classmates’ names.” Deborah, a first-grade teacher, expressed her reliance upon songs to reduce classroom stress. She stated, “We may just break out into song when anxiety is high. When they are calmed down, we talk about the problem.” Two second-grade teachers Edward and Grace asserted the importance of taking instructional time to teach how to build relationships. Edward maintained that building relationships at the beginning of the year strengthened both teacher-student and peer-peer interpersonal relationships. Grace explained that the primary reason for being in the classroom is for learning. However, the classroom should provide a social emotional learning platform for developing relationships and social etiquette. Grace insisted, “A lot of times, I have to teach those skills.” She found that the child’s frustration was a source of displaying negative behaviors. She found that teaching the children to express themselves helped to reduce further escalation.

A lot of times when emotional children are upset, their voices get louder in a yelling voice. I say, now listen, am I yelling at you? And they say no. And I say, well, okay, the way I am talking to you is the way that you should be talking to me. I’m just letting them learn by example.

Andrew and Christina, second- and third-grade teachers respectively, strived to develop communication skills in their students. Christina believed that students should not shy away from students with emotional behavioral disabilities. Having several emotional behavioral students in her classroom at the present time, Christina taught her students to the importance of being a friend and being patient. She stressed, “If a student is upset or feeling stressed, it is not a reason to not talk to them., be a friend with that person and figure out why they feel and act the way that they do.” Andrew focused on enhancing the social emotional skills in his students that he believes he lacks:

I’m good at hiding my emotions, but I don’t think that necessarily a good thing for building relationships. So, I make an effort to show when I am excited and I try to teach the student to do the same...you know, enjoy each other.

Teachers in grades four and five commented on the more aggressive behaviors that they encountered in the classroom. All four teachers stressed the importance of social emotional learning as a preventative to behavioral disruptions. Isaac and Hayden, both fifth-grade teachers, stressed the importance of classroom social etiquette. Isaac explained, “It is difficult for EBD (emotional social disability) to work in groups. We actually have to walk them through it and teach them how.” Isaac elaborated on their self-control skills at the beginning of the year, “They are used to just screaming and taking and they do whatever.” Hayden reinforced the need for communication and social etiquette training in the classroom. He stated, “We practice conversation and dialogue about whose turn it is and when you are supposed to answer, how you are supposed to answer, and how you are supposed to respond to someone else’s answer.” Hayden

commented, “I have to be flexible with emotional support students, but the student has to practice and learn to be flexible with me and the other students.” Julia also a fifth-grade teacher with extensive experience in third and first grades has an individualized approach to social emotional learning. She stated, “I have been bounced around and taught a lot of different grade levels and nothing works for every grade or every kid.” Creating a teacher-student bond is the foundation for her ability to effectively change the negative behaviors of the student with emotional behavioral disabilities. Julia continued, “I have to know my student. I have to know how much my student can handle at a given time.” Julia referred to the amount of social emotional learning that the student could process in a given time frame and that she was “super hard” on the student at times when she knew he could handle it. When the student couldn’t handle excessive authority, she stated, “Then we work it out slowly.”

The elementary teachers in primary grades one, two and three expressed that their individual program was developed through years of classroom experience. Those teachers with the most years of experience provided comprehensive social emotional learning to their students with fidelity. The text evidence from the interviews reinforced the need for emotional and social skills in their students. Grace’s has developed perceptions of students with emotional behavioral disabilities based upon her experiences in the classroom. Her social emotional learning curriculum is grounded her belief that the student with emotional behavioral disabilities lacks emotional and impulse control. Grace stated, “There is just something within the child that they are not able to control the way that they are acting without developing coping skills.” Grace, like many of many of the

teachers expressed that it is easier to provide the skill set learning to prevent negative behaviors rather than reacting to the behaviors once exhibited by the student. Andrew, Christina, Deborah, and Edward acknowledged similar opinions as Grace. Christina contributed, “Recognizing that there might be an on-going problem and implementing interventions to avoid the child’s escalation is always preferable.” The participants expressed that their ability to recognize behavior nuances was key to providing support. Christina believed that her ability to recognize when “something is just not right” with the child has prevented many classroom disruptions. She explained, “My ability to recognize my emotions and the fact that they are not much different from the student’s emotions gives me an advantage.” Bethany expanded upon the importance social emotional learning of students with emotional behavioral disabilities with regular-education students. Bethany has experienced:

Emotional support students sometimes fear their safety or understanding about what is going to happen. They are afraid that they are going to be embarrassed or that they are not going to be able to do something. But, the regular-education students can break down some of the fear. I think that those kids with special needs watch the regular-ed kids and they do not look distressed. They see that they are having fun and that nothing bad is happening to them. So, they watch until they feel comfortable enough to that they can step in.

Low self-esteem of students with emotional behavioral disabilities has manifested through anger, withdrawal, and excessive attention seeking behaviors. Anger can lead to student escalation, leading to violent behaviors, and removal from the classroom.

Teaching the student how to cope with anger has lessened the negative behaviors of students. Deborah expressed that she has a “bag of tricks” to calm the student when experiencing anxiety, anger, or stress. She acknowledged, “I provide them with their own shelf of personal items. When the student feel that he needs to remove himself or I feel that he needs to remove himself from a stressful situation, he just goes to his shelf.”

Bethany and Christina both addressed how student with emotional behavioral disabilities have difficulty participating in activities with their peers. Bethany had a solution to the student’s tentativeness to joining group activities:

I leave the option on the table that they can join us at any time. Bethany leaves a chair on the outside of the activity for the student to sit and view. When he is ready, he will move the chair into the activity area...no pressure.”

There was less freedom among the fifth-grade teachers for student to decide upon his unwillingness to participate in classroom activities. “We are here to do a job and that job is to learn.” Julia expounded upon her assertion, “They tell me that they can’t do it. I sit with them and they get it done. Now, they can’t tell me that they can’t do it because they just did it.” Francesca was less tolerant of noncompliance. She insisted, “He needs to get the work done. I will put up with some defiance, but the fact of the matter is that at some point that day he will complete the assignment.” Hayden and Isaac had similar approaches to student activity withdrawal.

Teachers who maintained positive teacher-student relationships with students with emotional-behavioral disabilities manifested confidence in their expectations of classroom behavior and in their expectations for academic achievement. The expectation

for classroom work completion was consistent among the participant group. The participants expressed that they implemented interventions to neutralize negative behaviors. Without neutralizing the negative behaviors, the student would continue to escalate resulting in the suspension of and the possibility that student safety would be jeopardized through uncontrolled aggression.

A consensus among the participants reinforced the advantages for setting student classroom expectations at the beginning of the year. Bethany and Christina both asserted that they communicated on the first day of school to the children that they are the boss in the classroom. Edward reflected on his own beliefs about work completion, “There has to be some expectation of what you want from them and what you expect from them.” He added, “I tell them flat out, this was what you did, and this was what you should have done.” Similarly, Deborah reflected upon her expectations for work completion, “I have expectations that they will work, work hard, and that their work will be done.” Grace focused her attention on the purpose of the student being in the classroom. She stated, “The main reason they are here obviously, is for learning. The work being completed is the number one priority.” However, Andrew explained that was willing to compromise with the student, “He is going to get the work done either on my time or it can be on his time.” Andrew’s assertion that the student would get his classroom work done on his own time was echoed throughout the early primary grade teachers. Andrew, Bethany, Christina, and Deborah all commented that when the student refused to complete his work during classroom instruction, that he was going to finish the assignment during lunch or recess. Grace and Edward gave insight to possible work denial during classroom



instructional time. Edward related that the students with emotional behavioral disabilities enjoyed the one-on-one time with him. He recounted, “I had less of a problem getting him to work with me during his recess or lunch break. He seemed to want to be with me and have all of my attention.” Grace recounted similar observations about her interactions on the playground. She believed, “Emotional support students would rather sit with me and do their work on the playground than to play with the other kids. They like the one-on-one time.”

The elementary grade four and five teachers had relatively the same experiences with student work completion as the early primary grade teachers. All of the fourth- and fifth-grade teachers concurred that the teacher has to set the tone for classroom academic and behavioral expectations at the beginning of the year. More importantly, they agreed that being consistent with consequences to noncompliance gave them credibility. However, there was a differencing of opinion between the lower grade-level teachers and the higher grade-level teachers as to the amount of one-on-one time that was available for the child. Julia explained, “I need them to do their work.” She added, “It is so important that they know that from the beginning of the year.” Francesca reiterated an urgency for the student to get his work done during the class period. Francesca asserted, “I try meet his needs by letting him work at the back table or sit in my chair at my desk.” Although, she maintained that the student would miss recess time and complete his work on his own if he did not take advantage of her accommodations during class time.

Hayden expressed his commitment for rewards and punishment consistency. He stated, "I am probably one of the most consistent people out there with my student expectations, my reactions and my academic goal setting." Hayden said:

My expectation is that they buy in to whatever it is that I am telling them, and it starts from day one. I will never ask you to do something that you cannot do, and I will never ask you to do something that is harmful for you. So, believe in what I am telling you, buy into the fact that when I am saying to do something, there is a purpose for it.

Isaac said:

At the beginning of the year you have to set the tone for the classroom and establish the classroom rules, procedures, and consequences. If you are consistent and follow through after your first warning, the student who tends to misbehave will pick up on that.

Isaac reflected upon his purpose for providing instruction to students with emotional behavioral support. Isaac expressed, "I have always liked having emotional support students in my classroom. I guess it is a challenge. I guess I want to see if I can really help them and further them academically." His sentiments about students with emotional behavioral support encompassed the sentiments for all of the participants to some degree. Though, not all participants were as optimistic as Isaac of the student with emotion behavioral disabilities into their classroom.

There were no participants that expressed any negative emotions or reluctance to educating emotional support students in their classrooms. The teacher participants

expressed their confidence in their abilities to further the students academically and emotionally. However, many of the teachers expressed their ability to recognize known patterns of behaviors that have culminated in student escalation. Many of the teachers acknowledged that they are cognizant of when “something just isn’t right.” Andrew shared, “My thought is how to prevent it. Sometimes it is with humor and sometimes it may be a distraction. I am trying to contain the situation and not escalate it.” Grace responded, “I know what will escalate them and sometimes I have to tip toe around them to avoid a reaction.” Christina believed that understanding her own emotions and her ability to keep them intact, was useful for understanding the child’s emotions and keeping his emotions intact. Edward believed that his ability to show the student empathy before escalation was key to his combatting the removal of the student from the classroom due to uncontrolled behavior. Bethany and Deborah both relied upon their social emotional learning in the classroom and having established the leadership role as the deterrent to the student’s uncontrolled escalation. Bethany was forthright that her fearlessness to establish control of the situation was the deterrent to further escalation. “When I see escalation coming, I am not afraid to become very strict. This will head off a full-blown melt down. You have to have confidence if you are going to take that approach with the kiddo.” Similarly, Deborah asserted that, “I am not going to let them use their disability as an excuse for not pushing forward.”

Francesca and Julia utilized less confrontational methods when controlling student escalation and conflict. Francesca believed that she was able to remedy the conflict through redirection and removal of the stress trigger. She stated, “I am able to tell

when they are starting to get angry and frustrated. I can see that their melting point is starting to happen. So, they need to take a break from their routine.” Julia expressed, “When they are at their breaking point, I send them to do an errand for me.” Hayden took a different approach and asked the student to perform a task with him. Sometimes the task is not necessary, nor was it on his agenda. “I could tell that he was ready to lose it. I walked up to his table and asked him to do me a favor. Because of that one instance, he was onboard with me the rest of the year.” Isaac believed that you have to be honest and consistent, “I call them out and say, I know you are taking advantage of the situation with your behavior.”

Grace and Christina were forthcoming in their admission that their interventions do not work every time. There are instances when the student escalation reaches the threshold that he must be removed from the classroom. He is either sent to an intervention room or to an administrator’s office. All the participants agreed that having an administrator involved in the incident is the last resort. However, the assistance of the special education teacher is a commonly used practice. The regular-education teachers expressed that their most important relationships for support were the special-education teacher and the school counselors.

Teachers who maintain positive teacher-student relationships with students with emotional-behavioral disabilities created a mutually satisfying relationship through the desire to foster a mutually satisfying relationship, honest communication, empathy, and tolerance. Edward focused his communication style. He confidently expressed, “It is my delivery and what I am saying. It is my tone and my posture. I talk to them at eye level.”

Edward added, “you have to be perceptive to what the kid needs at the time.” Grace believed that her one-on-one time with the child was the key to her successful relationship. Grace stated:

It is usually recess time when they want to talk to me. They will get the work that they did not complete in class and sit with me by their choice. They will tell me about anything that comes to mind.

Andrew and Bethany believed that it is essential to share parts of their personal lives with the students and listen to the students when they share experiences of their lives. Andrew reinforced the need to care about the student’s needs. He stated, “I talk to them a lot. Many of them want to know about me and my family.” Bethany used the morning arrival timeframe to inquire about her students’ families or if they did anything fun the night before. Christina believed that her demeanor is conducive to her success communicating with her students. She explained, “I just talk in a calm voice. I want to make sure that they feel comfortable talking to me. I like to talk about anything that they are interest in.” Deborah like to show emotion and felt comfortable hugging her students and that she cared deeply for them, but also shared, “I am not a cutie type of teacher, I don’t talk fluff. It all has a meaning and usually it is related to the classroom work.”

Edward, Hayden, and Isaac noted that they did not inquire about the students’ personal or family lives. Hayden believed that it is more acceptable for a female elementary teacher to show affection than a male elementary teacher. He stated, “The counselor or principal is responsible for informing us of familial situations that may need attention.” Hayden explained further, “I want a positive rapport, but I don’t want

anything coming back at me.” Three of the four male teachers expressed that they felt somewhat more vulnerable to showing affection and talking about personal topics with their students. Hayden explicitly expressed an undertone that was implicitly expressed by the other male teachers during the interviews. He stressed, “In today’s day and age of being a male with young kids, I am leery about getting too close or knowing too much.” Hayden and Isaac both were confident that their businesslike attitude promoting student pride and self-esteem were enough to build a strong relationship with challenging students. Hayden confirmed, “I’m not a touchy-feely type...I fist bump, but that is about the extent of it. I think they sense how genuine I am with my words, with my conversations, and about what we are learning.” However, Hayden frequently shared with his student the challenges that he had to overcome to be successful. He added, “You know, that is why it is so important to tie your life experiences in with what is being learned in the classroom.” Isaac focused on showing respect and expecting respect in return. Isaac asserted, “I am a good communicator, especially with kids and I build a positive rapport with students with emotional behavioral disabilities. They are responsive to me because we have a positive rapport.”

Francesca reflected upon her assessment of the intensity of a negative behavior from a student with emotional behavioral disabilities. She maintained, “I demand respect from them, and I show them respects. It is a really great environment.” However, she stressed her willingness to self-check her assessment of student negative behaviors. She emphasized, “I would coach myself and say, I need to stop because it wasn’t that extreme.” Furthermore, Francesca stated, “I do not talk down to them. This makes them

trust me. I make it evident that they know that I trust and care for them.” Francesca exhibited a great deal of confidence in her ability to maintain classroom management expectations. She asserted, “Every child is different and there are definitely different ways that I treat an emotional support child. I know what I need to do to help this child and I know how to do it. You cannot take everything that they say to heart.” Francesca took an individualized approach to social emotional learning. She continued “I take pride in how I reach out to every child especially if they have problems.”

Julia admitted that she is overly concerned with the child’s wellbeing and that she takes many of their problems personally. Julia contended that her caring too much was her weakness in establishing consistent classroom management. Often, her approach worked for her, but she may not be preparing the student for the reality of classroom expectations at the next grade-level. She defended her actions, “Honestly, I ignore a lot of the little stuff because they want to goad you into a struggle.” She added, “If I keep yelling at them, they will keep doing the same behaviors over and over. Sometimes you just can’t give them a reaction.”

The participants expressed that maintaining positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities can be challenging after escalation or conflict. Each participant expressed the process required bringing the child back to a “good place” of acceptable behaviors and academic engagement. Julia, who had the most experience at various grade levels with students with emotional behavioral disabilities expressed that interpersonal conflict with teachers and peers increased as the students’ progress through elementary school. She reflected, “In kindergarten and first grade the child’s escalation

was expressed through crying and defiance. But, in second grade the frustration or anger became directed at me or a student and it continues to worsen as the kid gets older.”

Christina affirmed that there is the violent side of the student with emotional behavioral disabilities:

Maybe they are upset about something that happened at home, on the bus to school, or anything. We may never know. But if it is throwing, kicking, pushing desks you know, in that sort of situation you need to get more people involved who are prepared to deal with this type of aggressive behavior.”

The participants expressed that the student with emotional behavioral disabilities has extreme behaviors and reactions during normal circumstances. Hayden expressed his frustration at times when extreme student reactions to normal circumstances disrupted the classroom instructional lesson, “That you know, that is tough sometimes.” Francesca shared, “I have definitely been there when a child is angry. He doesn’t want to look at you and shouts out that he hates you.” Christina recounted times when the child would be screaming at her in the classroom and throwing books off of their desk. She contended, “I have had to remove the rest of the class from the room on more than one occasion and then the team would come in and we would have to deescalate him before we removed him from the room.” Grace and Andrew have experienced similar situations. Both Grace and Andrew have experienced students throwing or upsetting their desks. Edward expressed, “The runners cause me anxiety.” The participants expressed that extreme teacher-student conflict may require the support of administrators, special-education professionals, and school counselors to calm the child. Given an appropriate cool down



period for both the teacher and the student, reestablishing a positive teacher-student relationship after conflict may not be a difficult task. Hayden expressed, “The child very possible will forget about it five minutes after the incident.” Patience is necessary to wait for the appropriate time to begin to rebuild the relationship is most advantageous.

Deborah emphasized, “If the child is still in the angry mode, they are not ready to hear me or perhaps I am not ready to hear them, so I wait.” Deborah had her own process for reestablishing a relationship with the child. She added, “I often use the counselor’s office because it is a setting that is neutral. I like to use different spaces in the building to solve the problem. Typically, we talk and end up coloring together.” Most of the participants agreed that the best place to reestablish the relationship was outside of the classroom.

Andrew, Christina, Edward, Grace, and Francesca used the playground or cafeteria to talk about what happened and how the problem may have been better handled. Edward expressed that he would make himself available in the cafeteria or playground after an incident. He maintained, “Usually when I was not expecting it, he would look at me and say that he was sorry.”

It was a commonality among the participants that they would wait for the appropriate time to reestablish a damaged relationship. The key components of reconciling was patience and permitting the child to reenter the relationship. Bethany commented, “You always want to give the student a way back in. You don’t want to back them into a corner.” Deborah and Christina have had positive results by waiting for the student to calm himself. Additionally, Christina felt that it was beneficial to reassure the student that she cared about them during conflict and afterwards. She added, “There has

to be empathy in these situations.” Andrew, Francesca, Julia, Hayden, and Isaac were in agreement that there must be a period of time to return to calm. Each teacher thought it necessary to emphasize a fresh start. Hayden asserted, “It is a clean slate every day or every ten minutes if need be.” Andrew talked with his students and assured that their conflict was “it is water under the bridge.” Julia felt that the student has to be given a new chance to do it right. Francesca continued to have an open invitation back to instructional engagement. Isaac asserted that even after conflict, he gave the student a sense of worth and that they always had a role in his classroom. Bethany told her students every morning, “We all have the chance to be an even better me than the yesterday’s me.”

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

In a qualitative study, the credibility of the study is dependent upon on the accurate interpretation of the data. The accurate interpretation of the data is dependent upon the trustworthiness and credibility of the researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). Trustworthiness of the data was demonstrated through four elements. These elements include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I gathered evidence of the experiences and perceptions of regular-education teachers in the mainstream classroom who maintained positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities. Building administrators observed teachers appeared to be reflective of their actions, had self-control during conflict, had positive responses to negative student behaviors, possessed effective stress coping-skills, and positively adapted to changing and difficult environments. The teachers manifesting these qualities were deemed as distinguished or proficient for maintaining positive relationships with

student with emotional behavioral disabilities in the mainstream classroom. The personal and professional knowledge of building administrators contributed greatly to the selection of the participants. Additional criterion required that each teacher had a minimum of five years of regular-education classroom experience with emotional behavioral disability students. I conducted one-on-one semi-structured interviews with each of the participants who met the criteria for the study. Next, I sent a copy of the transcript to each participant who requested to verify their results. Participants' review of their transcripts served to complete member checking (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I combined the ten participant responses with my annotations and observations to triangulate the data. The data were reviewed and assigned first-cycle a priori codes. The data was further analyzed during the second cycle of data coding. In vivo codes during the second cycle of coding provided for more concisely describes and the categorization of the data. The third and final cycle of coding identified patterns and themes across the data. I consulted with two colleagues who had attained doctorate-level degrees to provide me with a peer review of my analysis. There were several minor adjustments to improve the alignment of my themes to the data.

The detailed description of the setting, context, and research design established transferability. These components permit the reader to apply my findings in this study to broader contexts while maintaining a clear understanding of the context of my study. The 10 teacher participants were selected using a purposeful sampling technique. The group had extensive experience with students with emotional behavioral disabilities and provided thick, rich detailed responses to the interview questions. Their responses were

representative of their experiences and perspectives with of the phenomenon and support the transferability of the findings of this study.

Dependability was achieved through the implementation and adherence to a solid research design. The qualitative naturalistic-constructionist study involving responsive interviewing provided for aligning the data collected to the research question. Interview transcripts were sent to participants to ensure accuracy and upon completion of the data analysis, I sent the emergent themes to the participants for their review and to my colleagues for their peer review of my analysis. Having extensive experience with students with emotional behavioral disabilities, I need to ensure that my own biases did not impact my interpretation of the data. In order to minimize personal bias, I adhered closely to the structure of the responsive interview technique with scripted follow-up and probing questions. The transcripts were compared to the digitally recorded interview for accuracy and to maintain consistency for each subsequent interview. I was able to verify the objectivity of my interpretation of the data through peer review input.

### **Summary**

The purpose of the study was to gain an understanding of how emotional-social intelligence competencies empower regular-education teachers to maintain positive teacher-student relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in the elementary mainstream classroom. The conceptual framework for the study was supported by the emergent themes and answered the research question guiding the study. Three themes emerged from analysis of the data that were shown to influence the effectiveness of maintaining positive relationships.

**Theme One**

Teachers who maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities embedded social emotional learning into their classroom curriculum. This was evidenced by the number of teachers who practiced social emotional learning. The regular-education teachers found that addressing the social and emotional needs of the students throughout the school year solved potential classroom problems that would have emerged from students with emotional behavioral disabilities had they not been provided the opportunity to practice classroom etiquette.

**Theme Two**

Teachers who maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities established academic and behavioral expectations. The participants were consistent in their assertions that students with emotional behavioral disabilities complete their assignment each day. Interestingly, the participants were cognizant of the emotional state of the student at all times during the day; stressing that they were vigilant to identify changes in mood or behavior. They expressed that controlling their impulses and understanding the need of the student was essential to delivering their message. Each teacher had a repertoire of options for the student to complete assignments with supports and interventions. The participants believed that their high expectations for academics and behavior gave the student with emotional behavioral disabilities structure and defined their boundaries. More importantly, the participants offered their one-on-one attention during noninstructional times to assist the student in completing their assignments. This

was directly related to the teacher developing a relationship with the student. Many times, the student sought out the teacher for individualized attention during lunch and recess.

### **Theme Three**

Teachers who maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities fostered mutually satisfying relationships. The participants expressed that relationships between the student and the teacher must provide for the needs of the student and themselves. The student responded positively when he bonded with his teacher and peers. This was accomplished through meeting the various needs of the child. Many times, this included social emotional learning, individualized attention, modified and adapted assignments, and respectful conversations. However, the teacher's needs had to be fulfilled in order to sustain a mutually satisfying relationship. The most significant teacher need was the student's ability to remain engaged in instruction and limit nonpreferred behaviors. Each teacher stressed the importance of instruction in the classroom for all students.

The interpretation of the findings and implications of the results are presented in the next chapter. Chapter 5 discusses the limitations of the study and provide recommendations for expanding the research for maintaining positive teacher-student relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities. The chapter concludes with the potential impact for positive social change as a result of my study.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Teacher emotional-social intelligence has been influential in maintaining positive relationships with students in both regular-education and special-education classrooms. Emotional-social intelligence competency permits teachers to recognize and control emotions in themselves, recognize the emotions of their students, control impulsive responses that damage relationships with their students, and provide for the emotional and social needs of a student to establish an effective academic and social environment. The purpose of my study was to gain understanding of how emotional-social intelligence competencies empowered regular-education teachers to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in elementary mainstream classrooms. The Bar-On 10-factor structure emotional-social intelligence model was the conceptual framework for this study. I used a qualitative naturalist-constructionist research approach and the responsive interview technique to identify the gap in knowledge of how emotional-social intelligence competency empowers regular-education teachers to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in the elementary mainstream classroom. The naturalist-constructionist approach guided the responsive interview technique exploring research participants' perceptions and experiences involving the phenomenon. The following research question guided this study:

*RQ1:* How do emotional-social intelligence competencies empower regular-education teachers to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in elementary mainstream classrooms?

Data for the qualitative study were collected through 10 one-on-one semi-structured interviews. The interviews maximized the collection of thick, detailed-rich data through 10 semi-structured interview questions guided by the responsive interviewing technique. As a result of the data analysis process, three themes emerged guided by the conceptual framework of the Bar-On 10-factor structure emotional-social intelligence model.

As a result of the data analysis process, three themes emerged. First, teachers who maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities embedded social emotional learning into their classroom curriculum. Second, teachers who maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities established academic and behavioral expectations. Third, teachers who maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities fostered mutually satisfying relationships.

The construct's four meta-factorial components and 10 factorial competencies are as follows: (a) intrapersonal emotional-social intelligence competency (self-regard, emotional self-awareness, and assertiveness), (b) interpersonal emotional-social intelligence competency (empathy and interpersonal relationship), (c) stress management emotional-social intelligence competency (stress tolerance and impulse control), and (d) adaptability emotional-social intelligence competency (reality-testing, flexibility, problem-solving). The four meta-factorial components and 10 meta-factor competencies facilitated each of the 10 semi-structured interview questions.



Participants for my study were selected with the assistance of building principals at the research site. Building principals observed and identified teachers who appeared to reflect on their actions, had self-control during conflicts, had positive responses to negative student behaviors, possessed effective stress coping skills, and positively adapted to changing and difficult classroom environments. Teachers manifesting these qualities were deemed as distinguished or proficient for maintaining positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in mainstream classrooms. Teacher participants had a minimum of five years of regular-education classroom experience with emotional behavioral disability students.

The findings of my research support existing research regarding the importance of teachers maintaining positive teacher-student relationships in the classroom. The research of my study extends the knowledge of how social-emotional intelligence competencies empowered regular-education teachers to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in elementary mainstream classrooms.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

Participants experienced classroom challenges with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in comparison to non-disabled students. Students with emotional behavioral disabilities displayed lower social engagement, a disregard for authority, indifference to or defiance of classroom rules, and minimal instructional engagement. Within the classroom, students with emotional behavioral disabilities displayed unpredictable and sometimes aggressive and violent behaviors toward both their teachers and peers. These behaviors were a barrier to maintaining relationships within the

classroom. Furthermore, unpredictable student behavior interrupted the teachers' planned instruction and the reduced instructional time. The findings with this study were consistent with prior research that identified the connection between teacher emotional intelligence competency enabled teachers to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disability in the elementary mainstream classroom.

The first theme, teachers who maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disability embedded social emotional learning into their classroom curriculum has been supported by the research of Poulou (2017) and her assertion that the effectiveness of social emotional learning is dependent upon the teacher's emotional intelligence competency. Poulou asserted that the effectiveness of social emotional learning is dependent upon the teacher's own emotional-social intelligence competency, instructional confidence, and the willingness to implement social emotional learning instruction with fidelity.

This study suggested that teachers who implemented social emotional learning into the classroom curriculum provided essential social skills. The social skills provided an opportunity for the teacher to model acceptable classroom behavior and the student the opportunity to practice developing and maintaining interpersonal relationships with his peers and his teacher. Teachers believed that providing social emotional learning was a proactive method in creating and communicating acceptable student behaviors.

The second theme, teachers who maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disability established academic and behavioral expectations is supported by the research of Poulou, Bassett, and Denham (2018) and their assertions

that effective teachers understood the emotional control necessary to communicate classroom behavioral and academic expectations. Additionally, my research was consistent with Sekreter (2019) and his assertions that teachers with emotional intelligence competency have superior classroom management, have fewer student behavioral problems and higher student academic achievement. The essence of this theme is dependent upon the teachers' social emotional competency of assertiveness. Teacher emotional-social competency enabled teachers to successfully communicate with authority and empathy, the classroom expectations for behavior and academics.

This study suggested that teachers had the ability to effectively establish academic and behavioral expectations when they understood the importance of meeting the emotional needs of students. Emotional-social intelligence competency enabled the teacher to provide the optimal learning conditions for students. More importantly, teachers who understood the importance of meeting the emotional needs of the students strived to create an ideal learning environment, encouraged positive social interactions, assisted with instructional engagement, and motivated their students to learn.

The third theme, teachers who maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities fostered mutually satisfying relationships was consistent with the research of Poulou (2017) and her assertion that teacher-student relationships are a predictor of the student's emotional behavioral difficulties in the classroom. Additionally, Poulou asserted that positive teacher emotions foster satisfying relationships in the classroom leading to increased positive student behaviors.

**Research Question**

*RQ:* How do emotional-social intelligence competencies empower regular-education teachers to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in the elementary mainstream classroom?

**Theme One: Social Emotional Learning Within Classroom Instructional Curriculum**

It is suggested from the data analysis that teachers who maintained positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities built a classroom community among all learners. This was accomplished through embedded social emotional learning in the classroom curriculum. The three meta-factorial components aligned with the Bar-On 10-factor structure emotional-social intelligence model to provide social emotional learning within classroom instructional curriculum. The meta-factorials were intrapersonal, interpersonal, and stress management. Social emotional competencies influencing the empowerment of regular-education teachers to provide social emotional learning were rooted in the teachers' clear understanding of the importance of (a) establishing and maintaining mutually satisfying relationships, (b) relating well to others, (c) the awareness of how others feel, (d) empathy, and (d) effectively and constructively controlling emotions (Bar-On, 2020). The data analysis identified the five competency traits and characteristics as the underpinnings for providing social emotional learning within the elementary mainstream classroom.

This research study supported the prior research. Weissberg et al. (2015) asserted that student social emotional competency is developed through social emotional learning.

Social emotional learning educated students to effectively manage emotions, feel and show empathy, maintain positive relationships, and make responsible academic and behavioral decisions. Teachers who possessed emotional social intelligence embedded social emotional learning into their classroom curriculum. Additionally, this research study supported the assertions that social emotional learning effectiveness is dependent upon the teacher's competency of emotional intelligence, instructional confidence, and the willingness to implement social emotional learning instruction with fidelity.

According to Bar-On (2005), intrapersonal competency manifested through the awareness of oneself, understanding one's strengths and weaknesses, and expressing one's thoughts and feelings in a nondestructive manner. Interpersonal competencies manifest through the ability of awareness of the emotions of others, their needs, and feelings, maintaining mutually beneficial relationships. Domitrovich, Durlak, Staley, and Weissberg (2017) said that social skills learning is most effective when divided between intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies. Intrapersonal competencies accounted for realistic goal setting, positive mindsets, self-control, coping strategies, and emotional regulation. Interpersonal competencies accounted for listening and communication skills, the ability to negotiate a satisfactory outcome for all stakeholders, and the ability to maintain interpersonal relationships.

The findings in the study identified social skills that enhanced the educational experience for students with emotional behavioral disabilities. Intrapersonal skills were introduced to assist the student with emotional regulation, impulse control, stress management coping skills, and maintaining a positive mindset. Intrapersonal skill set

learning for early primary-grade students focused on establishing and maintaining relationships using social classroom etiquette training. Primary teachers spent significant time providing coping skill strategies that reduced the student's stress and provided interventions and supports that reinforced these strategies (Ruzek et al., 2016).

Interpersonal skill set learning, for early primary grade students, focused upon communication with both the teacher and peers. Effective communication reduced student frustration and escalation. Additionally, social emotional learning was instrumental in the development of stress-management coping skills. The participants in this study stressed the importance of providing social emotional learning to both regular-education students and students with disabilities. Social emotional learning for students with emotional behavioral disabilities focused upon practice of classroom social etiquette. Social emotional learning for regular-education students enhanced their understanding of students with disabilities and increased their expression of empathy and tolerance.

The higher elementary grade-level teachers, grades four and five, had credited social emotional learning for establishing social etiquette for student-teacher and peer interpersonal interactions during paired and grouped activities. Social emotional learning focused upon respectful communication and impulse control. Their classroom experience with students with emotional behavioral disabilities substantiated the necessity to provide such instruction. According to Poulou (2017), the teacher's ability and willingness to provide social emotional learning in the classroom increased the student's social emotional skills and reduced negative behaviors during academic instruction.

Interpersonal skills were introduced to maximize the child's ability to effectively listen and communicate. Additionally, the skills assisted in developing effective problem solving and peer negotiation skills.

Stickle, Bailey, Brion-Meisels, and Jones (2019) asserted that adhering to social emotional learning with fidelity significantly increased their academic growth and preferred classroom behaviors. Many teachers expressed that their social emotional learning instruction was not a perfect format, and some acknowledged that during times of frustration, they have used the interventions as a punishment. Providing social emotional learning increased the teachers daily instructional responsibilities. However, they expressed that the social emotional learning program's student benefit outweighed the increased workload.

The social constructionist views the classroom as a community of learners. It is necessary that the student take ownership in his learning, has peer interactions, and the experiences are authentic (Azzarito & Ennis, 2003). The classroom community is a place where students may develop relationships and build their community. Additionally, one can learn from his mistakes and continue to explore and resolve emotional and social challenges (Wachtel, 2013). Participants prided themselves on providing a safe and risk-free environment for their students. They believed their classrooms were a place where students could explore the benefits of being a good student, good friend, and a good person. Social emotional learning did not guarantee that the student with emotional behavioral disabilities would advance in a linear fashion, nor consistently behave in a

predictable manner during routine events. The classroom teachers agreed that controlling the impulsivity of the student remained a work in progress.

### **Theme Two: Established Expectations for Student Classroom Behavior and Academic Goals**

The results in Chapter 4 suggested that teachers who maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities established expectations for classroom behavior and academic goals. The meta-factorial components that aligned with the Bar-On 10-factor structure emotional-social intelligence model to establish expectations for student classroom behavior and academic achievement were intrapersonal, interpersonal, and adaptability. Social emotional competencies influencing the empowerment of regular-education teacher to establish expectations for student classroom behavior and academic achievement were rooted in the teacher's ability to (a) express feelings, beliefs and thoughts as well as well as the ability to defend one's rights in a nondestructive manner, (b) be aware of and understand how others feel, (c) effectively and constructively control our emotions, and (d) adjust our feelings, thinking and behavior to new situations and conditions. The foundational building blocks of the Bar-On emotional-social intelligence theory is based upon attaining competency of emotional self-awareness, empathy, assertiveness, and impulse control (Bar-On, 2020). The data analysis of my research study identified these four competency traits as the underpinning for the teacher to establish academic and behavioral expectations.

According to Bar-On (2005), academic and behavioral expectations may be accomplished without being aggressive, abusive, or destructive to the individual and the



relationship. Individuals that can communicate without creating conflict during interactions are guided by their principles and can affirm themselves and their beliefs. Teacher participants in the study asserted that regardless of the emotional state of the child, it is the responsibility of the student to complete his assignments before the end of the day. Sekreter (2019) asserted that a child's motivation and energy to remain engaged to complete assignments were drained by teacher's incapable of creating a positive classroom environment for themselves and their students. Effective teachers understood their emotions and strived to create an ideal learning environment for all students encouraging positive social interactions, instructional engagement, and motivation to learn.

Teachers who successfully established expectations for their students were realistic and effective at understanding problems, setting reasonable and doable learning goals for their students, sensed the urgency of student success, and eliminated negativity from the classroom. These teachers were adept at adjusting their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors to solve problems and reduce conflict. The emotional-social intelligence competency of emotional self-awareness underpins emotional awareness of themselves and others. Bar-On (2005) stressed that emotional self-awareness is the most important factorial component of emotional-social intelligence. It is very difficult for individuals lacking emotional-social competency to understand emotions of themselves and how those emotions impact the lives of others. Participants in this study displayed high competency for emotional self-awareness through their ability to justify their expectations effectively to their students.

The participants in the study were dependent upon their abilities to effectively express and defend the expectations to their students (Bar-On, 2020). Effective use of emotional self-expression serves to authenticate the teachers position of leader in the classroom. Teacher assertiveness combined with positive interactions, maintaining close proximity, and promptly and consistently responding to expectation compliance and violations resulted in maintaining a positive teacher-student relationship that decreased negative behaviors and increased academic engagement (Elder, Ayvazo, & Hirschmann, 2018). Despite the emotional state of the student with emotional behavioral disabilities, it was essential that he complete his classroom assignments before the end of the school day.

Students with emotional behavioral disabilities had difficulty focusing on difficult tasks and were prone to displaying negative behaviors as a technique to avoid academic work (Hind et al., 2019). Primary-grade teachers expressed concern for the attainment of academic skill mastery when negative behaviors were frequently displayed by the student (Forlin, Keen, & Barrett, 2008). There was a universal willingness among the participants to assist the child academically during recess, lunch and noninstructional times in the classroom to enhance basic skills acquisition in the primary grades. Many students took advantage of the one-on-one time with their teacher during noninstructional times. The teachers displayed a genuine interest and concern for fulfilling the instructional needs of the student. The implementation of differentiated instruction served as an acceptable alternative when it was evident that the daily assignment could not be completed in its entity.

### **Theme Three: Fostering Positive Relationships**

The results in Chapter 4 suggested that teachers maintained positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities strategically fostered positive relationships. The four meta-factorial components of intrapersonal, interpersonal, stress management, and adaptability aligned with the Bar-On 10-factor structure emotional-social intelligence model to maintain positive teacher-student relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in the elementary mainstream classroom. My research suggested that teachers foster positive relationships when they understand the importance of (a) establishing and maintaining mutually satisfying relationships, (b) cultivating friendly relations, (c) effectively and constructively controlling emotions, (d) expressing feelings on an emotional level, (e) expressing empathy, (f) tolerance for opposing ideas, and (g) sensing a problem and feeling confident and motivated to resolve the situation (Bar-On, 2020). The data analysis of my research study identified these seven competency characteristics and traits were the underpinning for establishing and maintaining positive teacher-student relationships.

The study findings supported the assertions of the Bar-On emotional-social intelligence theory of maintaining positive relationships. Bar-On (2020) asserted that a mutually satisfying interpersonal relationship requires the ability to relate well to others. Individuals who are adept at interpersonal relationships are characterized by appropriately giving and receiving warmth, the desire to cultivate friendly associations, the ability to feel at ease and comfortable in a relationship and possess positive expectations for interpersonal interactions. The research participants expressed the

difficulties involved with maintaining positive a relationship with emotional behavioral disability students. They expressed that it is a difficult task for mainstream classroom teachers to meet all the students' needs. However, the participants expressed empathy as an important factor for maintaining mutually satisfying relationships. The teachers' ability to understand the motivations and the emotions of the student increased the likelihood that the relationship would be sustained.

The findings suggested that interpersonal relationships must be mutually satisfying for both the teacher and the student. Teachers expressed the importance of establishing acceptable student behavior and academic achievement expectations early in the school year. Once the student boundaries were established, the teacher believed that it was his or her obligation to provide the appropriate support for student achievement (Ruzek et al., 2016). Although relationship building among students with emotional behavioral disabilities is stressful and challenging, academic success in the classroom is dependent upon the student maintaining positive relationships with both his teacher and his peers (Merida-Lopez & Extremera, 2017; Poulou, 2017). Teachers credited their willingness to provide one-on-one academic and emotional support during noninstructional times strengthened the teacher-student relationship. Individualized time for social interactions were found to increase instructional engagement and preferred behaviors (Archambault et al., 2017). However, the teachers had high expectations for the student's respect and instructional engagement in return.

The teacher participants utilization of empathy empowered their understanding student behavioral motivations and gave them insight as to the relationship needs of the

student. According to Dar (2015), teachers must be capable of displaying effective interpersonal skills such as empathetic and pro-social behaviors. Dar asserts that social skills awareness and empathy are equally as important to the classroom environment as pedagogical awareness. A teacher who valued the importance of caring, positively affected the student's psychological well-being and was more likely to experience academic success. The participants expressed their obligation as educators to empathize with the student and provide for his emotional needs. Goroshit and Hen (2016) asserted that empathy is a moral feeling concerning others that facilitates meaningful interpersonal relationships. Empathy is the driving force behind understanding and predicting the actions of others. It is improbable that a person lacking empathy would be capable of experiencing the feelings of others, nor the capacity to express that understanding. The authors stressed the importance of teacher empathy when maintaining relationships with students. Research suggests that empathetic teachers strengthened the students' sense of belonging to the classroom community, enhance social relationships teacher and peers, increases acceptable behaviors, and boosted the student's instructional engagement.

### **Limitations of the Study**

My study was limited in generalizability as the result of the small purposeful sample population of 10 regular-education teacher participants. The responses gathered through this qualitative naturalist-constructionist approach provided thick, rich in-depth information on how emotional-social intelligence competencies empowered regular-education teachers to maintain positive relationships with student with emotional behavioral disabilities in the mainstream classroom. However, the responses may not

have accurately reflected the experiences from more timid participants, nor encompassed all perceptions and experiences that a larger sample population may provide.

Another limitation of the qualitative naturalist-constructionist approach was that the regular-education teachers in the mainstream classroom were from one research site. Therefore, the results of this study may only be transferable to elementary-school settings. Consequently, middle, and high school teachers in the research-site district were not included in the research study.

The sample population was dependent upon building principals who referred teachers who they deemed as distinguished or proficient at maintaining relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities. The sampling technique may have been subjected to principal selection bias as the participant selection may have been influenced by their personal relationship with the building principal.

Finally, I may have unintentionally imposed by bias upon the research collection and analysis process through my previous experience, knowledge, sentiments, and attitudes of the phenomenon. However, every attempt was made to suspend my personal experience, knowledge, sentiments, and attitudes while collecting and analyzing the data. The process was completed in a manner that deemed all participant discourse relevant to the research study.

### **Recommendations**

This research study contributes to the existing body of knowledge of empowering regular-education teachers to maintain positive relationships with their students. This research study extends previous research studies pertaining to empowering teachers

through positive teacher-student relationships. Using the Bar-On 10-factor structure emotional-social intelligence model as the conceptual framework for my study, I explored how emotional-social intelligence competency influenced the empowerment of teachers to maintain positive teacher-student relationships. Building upon emotional-social intelligence competencies, I further explored how these competencies empowered regular-education teachers to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in the elementary mainstream classroom.

My research suggests teachers who have not been able to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in their mainstream classroom may benefit from emotional-social intelligence competency development. Through emotional-social development, teachers may increase academic instruction time through decreased behavioral concerns in the classroom. It is recommended that elementary principals apply the findings and provide professional development to teachers who have not been able to establish and maintain the same positive relationships with student with emotional behavioral disabilities as the participants in this research study. In addition, principal awareness and recognition of the advantages of emotional-social intelligence competencies in the mainstream classroom may assist them in the selection process for hiring new regular-education teachers.

Recommendations for further research studies for this topic may focus upon expanding the participant sample populations, isolating competencies, and exploring more student disability categories. First, increase the number of participants for the study to obtain additional regular-education teacher perspectives and experiences on

maintaining positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in the elementary mainstream classroom. The small sample of the current study may not adequately represent the larger population of regular-education teachers and how they maintain positive relationships with emotional behavioral disability students. A larger sample size may increase transferability. Second, researchers may expand the research study to include middle school and high school regular-education teachers in the mainstream classroom for their perspectives and experiences on maintaining positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities. Extending the study to include the experiences and perceptions of additional grade-level teachers may serve to expand the knowledge of social-emotional intelligence competency among middle and secondary teacher groups. Third, isolate individual competencies of the Bar-On 10-factor structure emotional social intelligence model to more deeply explore how a single emotional-social competency may influence maintaining positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities. The isolation of a single component may permit the researcher to more fully extend the knowledge of each meta-factorial component. Finally, the research could be expanded to explore how social emotional competency empowers regular-education teachers to maintain positive relationships with students with individualized disabilities protected under the umbrella term of emotional behavioral disabilities. Extending the research may permit researchers the opportunity to compare and contrast the results of this study.



### **Implications**

My study has the capacity to significantly impact for positive social change. The results of the current study may influence how regular-education teachers in the mainstream classroom perceive and interact with students with emotional behavioral disability. Frequently, the teacher is confronted with students with emotional behavioral disabilities who persist in their disregard for authority, indifferent to adult requests for classroom compliance, and display frequent disengagement (Spielberger, 2004). Students with emotional behavioral disabilities escalate as a natural response to poor coping skills and emotional immaturity (Buttner et al., 2016). Regular-education teachers are prone to encountering conflictual situations with students with emotional behavioral disabilities. Teachers are ill-prepared for the unpredictable behavior of these students (Algozzine, 2017; Buttner et al., 2016; Climie, 2019; Gidlund & Bostrom, 2017; Mastoras, Saklofske, Schwean & Climie, 2018). Frequent outbursts and disregard for classroom social etiquette norms often create barriers to establishing meaningful relationships with their classroom teacher and peers (Buttner et al., 2016; Kaya, et al., 2015). However, research has consistently suggested that teachers who possess emotional-social intelligence competency are adroit in understanding the motives behind the student's negative behaviors, express empathy and understanding, and establish and maintain a mutually satisfying interpersonal relationship (Dar, 2015; Poulou, 2017). My study revealed effective teacher practices that may be applied to students with emotional behavioral disabilities to maintain positive teacher-student relationships.

A positive classroom environment created by regular-education teachers who display competency of emotional-social intelligence, provides students with emotional behavioral disabilities the social emotional learning tools essential to maintaining mutually satisfying relationships that continue through their academic career (Sutherland, Conroy, Algina, Ladwig, Jessee, & Gyure, 2018). Teachers who are willing and capable of establishing meaningful relationships, prepare their students by providing classroom social etiquette skills that defuse oppositional, disruptive, and antagonistic behaviors (Archambault et al., 2017). Students who continue to exhibit disruptive and aggressive behavior in the classroom are more likely to remain in conflict with their peers and teachers for the duration of their academic experience.

By creating a positive environment and establishing positive teacher-student relationships, the emotional behavioral disability student may embrace the classroom experience and build upon the social emotional learning skills that facilitate his being an integral part of the educational community. Understanding the importance of teacher emotional-social intelligence competency may inspire administrators, in a similar context, to provide professional development to accomplish the same classroom success as the teacher participants in the study. My research results suggested that emotional-social intelligence competency influences the ability for teachers to maintain positive relationships with student with emotional behavioral disabilities in the elementary mainstream classroom. Positive teacher-student relationships decreased nonpreferred student behaviors and increase instructional engagement. Ultimately, increasing the

instructional minutes in the classroom and increasing the opportunity of academic achievement of all students.

### **Conclusion**

This qualitative naturalist-constructionist research study provided data suggesting that emotional-social intelligence competency influences the empowerment of regular-education teachers to maintain positive relationships with students with emotional behavioral disabilities in the elementary mainstream classroom. Teachers are highly influential in the success of a student's academic school year. Likewise, teachers are highly influential in the social and emotional success of the student's academic school year (Poulou, 2017). Student academic success is dependent upon the regular-education teachers' willingness and attitude to accept students with emotional behavioral disabilities in the mainstream classroom (Hind et al., 2019). An idealistic education system would provide everything to everyone. However, we have not accomplished an idealistic educational system. Nonetheless, the reality between inclusion and academic achievement is that special-needs students learn in vastly different styles and time frames than students without disabilities. The learning disparity between students with emotional behavioral disabilities and their non-disabled peers will continue to be an instructional challenge (Clark, et al., 2018). There must be a sense of urgency to support academic achievement for students with emotional behavioral disabilities in the mainstream classroom.

The emotional support student affects the emotional state and well-being of the classroom teacher. Inclusion has upset the traditional balance between teacher authority

and student submission (Gidlund, 2017; Gidlund, 2018; Lopez & Corcoran, 2014; Pennings et al., 2018; Pereira & Lavoie, 2018; Poulou, 2017). The challenging behaviors of students with emotional behavioral disabilities continue to increase teacher stress (Mérida-Lopez & Extremera, 2017). When stress increases beyond the limit of manageability, the teacher may experience burnout, anxiety, declined health and declined self-esteem (Gidlund & Bostrom, 2017; Hofenbeck, 2017; Jennings, 2015; Lee & Chelladurai, 2016). Student behavioral disruptions strain teacher-student relationships, inhibit instructional goals, and increase teacher frustration, stress, and burnout (Foley & Murphy, 2015; Gidlund & Bostrom, 2017; Lee & Chelladurai, 2016). To preserve educational equilibrium, strategies must be provided to the classroom teacher to maintain adequate stress tolerance and coping skills to deal with the profession's daily demands (Bar-On, 2020).

The composition of the regular-education classroom has changed significantly in the last 20 years of public education. Students with disabilities who were once delegated to separate classrooms are now educated among their peers. Regular-education students are being taught tolerance and acceptance of special-education students sharing the same academic space. My research study revealed that all participants believed that students with special needs should be educated in the mainstream classroom when academically and behaviorally appropriate. The participant teachers asserted that they felt personally prepared for the challenges of education students with emotional behavioral disabilities when appropriate supports were available. However, many of the participants had witnessed regular-education teachers who lacked the emotional-social intelligence to

properly manage the challenging behaviors of emotional behavioral disability students. Underdeveloped social-emotional competency, classroom management, and interrelationship skills have resulted in escalation of students with emotional behavioral disabilities, loss of instructional time and peer resentment. The conclusions provided by the data analysis of this research study may influence the decision of building principals to provide professional development for teachers who have been unable to maintain positive teacher-student relationships as the participants in this research study.

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## Appendix A: Partner Organization Agreement

*Date*

*Organization Name*

*Superintendent Name*

*Organization Address*

To Whom It May Concern:

The doctoral student, Christopher J. Hanna, will be conducting a dissertation study as part of his EdD program. The student will be completing Walden internal review board (IRB) requirements and the Walden University research approval process.

I understand that Walden's IRB has given the student tentative approval to interview elementary teachers in the XXXXXX School District. I understand the Walden's IRB has stipulated that Mr. Hanna cannot and use elementary teachers from the building of which he is the principal. Mr. Hanna will conduct his interviews with elementary teacher participants who perform instruction at the XXXXXX School District fourth- and fifth- grade XXX Elementary School and from XXXX Elementary School.

I understand that, as per doctoral program requirements, the student will publish a dissertation in ProQuest as a doctoral capstone (withholding the names of the organization and participating individuals), as per the following ethical standards:

- a. The student is required to maintain confidentiality by removing names and key pieces of evidence/data that might disclose an organization's or individual's identity.
- b. The student will be responsible for complying with policies and requirements regarding data collection.
- c. Via the Interview Consent Form, the student will describe to the interviewees how the data will be used in the dissertation study and how all interviewees' privacy will be protected.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research activities in this setting.

Signed,

## Appendix B: Confidentiality Agreement

Name of Signer: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_, a doctoral candidate at Walden University, has asked me to review potential interview questions for his research study on leadership practices of principals. I will have access to information that is confidential and should not be disclosed. I acknowledge that the information must remain confidential.

By signing this Confidentiality Agreement, I acknowledge and agree that:

- I will not disclose or discuss any confidential information with others.
- I will not in any way divulge, copy, release, sell, loan, alter or destroy any confidential information except as properly authorized.
- I will not discuss confidential information where others can overhear the conversation.

By signing this document, I acknowledge that I have read the agreement and I agree to comply with all the terms and conditions stated above.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_