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Benefits of Additional Training for Teaching Students with Emotional or Behavioral Disorders

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Walden University

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Lisa Bradford

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Walden University
2021

Abstract

Benefits of Additional Training for Teaching Students with Emotional or Behavioral
Disorders

by

Lisa Bradford

MA, Walden University, 2010

BS, Frostburg State University, 2001

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Walden University

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Abstract

A problem of low academic and behavioral achievement has been identified for students with emotional or behavioral disorders (EBDs) when compared to their peers without disabilities in the middle school general education setting. The purpose of this study was to understand the needs of general education teachers for additional training in academic and behavioral strategies to improve success for students with EBDs. The study was guided by Knowles's adult learning theory, andragogy, which states that adults learn based on the experiences they encounter. Three research questions guided the study related to the knowledge that middle school general education teachers have about teaching students with EBDs, how EBDs are addressed during instruction, and what additional trainings would be beneficial. A basic qualitative study design with purposeful sampling was utilized in which 11 general educators teaching students with EBDs were interviewed to discuss perceptions of their knowledge for teaching students with EBDs. Participant responses were analyzed using NVIVO; the following themes emerged from the data a) strategies planned for teaching students with EBDs, b) building relationships with students with EBDs, c) promoting success in the general education classroom, d) teacher preparation and classroom management, and e) student choice for students with EBDs answered research question one. Research question two was answered by the themes a) addressing growing agitation for students with EBDs, and b) promoting positive peer relationships. Finally, research question three was answered in one theme a) professional development and or needs. Social change implications may include teachers providing a more effective learning environment through appropriate professional development for teaching students with EBDs.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation paper to my husband, Dwight Bradford, for all of the support he has provided through this entire Doctoral journey. Words can never express the gratitude for the many tireless nights he spent completing all of the tasks required to keep our home functioning while I spent countless hours in front of the computer typing papers, researching, and moving one step closer to the goal of obtaining a doctoral degree. His selfless actions and sacrifices have enabled this dream to become a reality.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Personnel from a school district in the eastern United States expressed concerns with general education teachers needing more training to effectively teach students with emotional or behavioral disorders (EBDs) due to their lack of progress within the classroom. In this district setting, students with EBDs continued to demonstrate lower academic and behavioral achievement in school when compared to their peers without disabilities in the general education classroom (S. O'Meller, personal communication, October 25, 2017). Furthermore, a middle school principal reported that the quality of instruction received by students with EBDs in the general education classroom is less than adequate when compared to their peers without disabilities (J. Farmer, personal communication, January 22, 2017). A special education supervisor stated that students with EBDs are in the general education classroom for instruction for the majority of the school day but end up not as successful academically or behaviorally due to receiving most instruction outside the classroom as a result of their behavior disruptions (H. Bertrum, personal communication, April 26, 2017). A school district special education supervisor further communicated that general education teachers do not have the proper training to teach students with EBDs, causing consistent removal from the classroom (M. Houghlin, personal communication, April 26, 2017).

A review of current literature also illustrated a problem in academic and behavioral achievement between students with EBDs and their peers without disabilities. According to the research, students with EBDs perform lower on academic performance measures than their peers without disabilities (McDaniel et al., 2017). Furthermore,

students with EBDs underperform in all academic content areas due to the behavioral distractions they cause in the classroom (Billingsley et al., 2018; Gresham, 2015; Young, 2019). Similarly, students with EBDs leave middle school reading several grade levels below students with other disabilities and their peers without disabilities (Yakimowski et al., 2016).

More importantly, data collected from three different middle schools within a school district further demonstrated academic and behavioral achievement deficits for students with EBDs. The suspension rates for all students without disabilities in this middle school was 1%, but students with disabilities (SWD), including students with EBDs, was 3%. Furthermore, only 12% students without disabilities in this middle school were chronically absent, compared to 22% of SWD being chronically absent. Lastly, test scores in the areas of English and math have discrepancies. In English 47% of students without disabilities were proficient, compared to only 5% of SWD. In mathematics 47% of students without disabilities were proficient, and only 6% of SWD were proficient (Maryland Report Card, 2018).

Data collected from the second middle school for the 2017–2018 school year was somewhat different. Only 6% of students without disabilities were suspended, compared to 12% for SWD. Additionally, only 16% of students without disabilities were chronically absent, compared 27% of SWD. Finally, 44% of students without disabilities tested proficient in English, compared to only 4% of SWD, and 38% of students without disabilities tested proficient in mathematics, compared to only 9% of SWD (Maryland Report Card, 2018).

Data collected from the final middle school for the 2017–2018 school year was very different from the previous two middle schools. The suspension rates for students in this middle school were much higher. Out of school suspension rates were 13% for students without disabilities, and 17% for SWD. However, students without disabilities missed more school than SWD at 23% compared to 17%. The academic gap in English and math was also much larger at this middle school between students without disabilities and SWD. Thirty-eight percent of students without disabilities scored proficient in English, compared to 1% of SWD, and 27% of students without disabilities scored proficient in mathematics, compared to 3% of SWD (Maryland Report Card, 2018).

Based on the personnel interviews from the school district and current literature, it is important to explore the knowledge general education teachers have about teaching students with EBDs in their classrooms alongside their peers without disabilities. The data collected from all three middle schools also illustrates a need to conduct a study to understand what middle school general education teachers know about teaching students with EBDs. This basic qualitative study included an exploration of the perceptions of middle school general education teachers about teaching students with EBDs in their classrooms to address the problem with academic and behavioral achievement of students with EBDs.

Problem Statement

Only 46% of students with EBDs spend 80% or more of the school day in the general education classroom compared to 62.6% of students falling under all other disabilities (Freeman et al., 2019; Houghlin, personal communication, April 23, 2016).

Furthermore, reading and language deficits have been shown to be at least two grade levels below those without disabilities (Garwood, Vernon-Feagans, & Family Life Key Investigators, 2017). Students with EBDs are placed in more separate schools and residential settings, sent to the office, suspended, or expelled more often than their peers without disabilities (Deitrich et al., 2016; Wagner, Newman, et al., 2005, as cited in Murray, 2018). Students with EBDs also have a higher rate of being hospitalized or institutionalized as a result of their behaviors (Deiterich et al., 2016). Therefore, there is a problem with academic and behavioral achievement in the general education classroom for students with EBDs.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore middle school general education teachers' perceptions of their knowledge of teaching students with EBDs in the classroom. Students with EBDs are behind in one or more or all content areas of instruction (Billingsley et al., 2018; Gresham, 2015; Young, 2019). Therefore, understanding these teacher perceptions may lead to increased student achievement after determining their strengths and weaknesses, which can be an important component for understanding how to develop additional training for these general education teachers in academic and behavioral strategies for students with EBDs. Many middle school general education teachers of students with EBDs struggle to make decisions regarding the academic and behavioral areas to address from the start to increase student success due to not understanding the behaviors displayed by students with EBDs (Ennis, 2015; Young, 2019). It is common for teachers to be reactive and not proactive when addressing

discipline issues for students with EBDs (Patton, 2018; Ross & Sliger, 2015). This leads to students failing the most on competency exams as well as performing below grade level in important content areas such as mathematics (Peltier & Vannest, 2016).

Understanding general education teachers' knowledge of leveled behavior systems, academic strategies, and possibly the individualized education plan (IEP) process for determining eligibility for students with EBDs can be beneficial for future planning of professional development opportunities within a school district.

Guiding Research Questions

Research Question 1: What perceptions do middle school general education teachers have about teaching students with EBDs in the classroom?

Research Question 2: How are behaviors of students with EBDs addressed in the general education setting during instructional time?

Research Question 3: What additional trainings to teach students with EBDs would be beneficial for creating a positive learning environment?

Conceptual Framework

Andragogy, an adult learning theory, guided this study because teacher knowledge was the focal point of the study. Andragogy, created by Knowles (1980) in the 1970s, suggests that teachers benefit from being involved in the planning and evaluation of instruction. According to the theory, the ideal way for educators to learn is through acquiring knowledge in the setting of implementation (Knowles, 1980), and educators must know why they need to learn strategies before they learn how to implement those strategies (Knowles, 1989). Andragogy also coordinates six assumptions

related to adult learning and the characteristics associated with adult learning within the theory: (a) self-concept, (b) experience, (c) readiness to learn, (d) the orientation of learning, (f) motivation to learn, and (e) relevance (Knowles, 1980). Self-concept refers to adults wanting to move from being dependent beings to self-directing individuals. Experience refers to the experiences that educators have with students who have diverse encounters with the world around them, which presents difficulties for the typical classroom by requiring diverse teaching methods. Readiness to learn suggests that as individuals grow and develop they become ready to learn tasks that are directly related to what is needed to be successful in everyday life (Knowles, 1989). As individuals mature, orientation of learning also becomes important and is centered on solving problems associated with life. Furthermore, the mature person is motivated to learn when it is directly related to self-esteem, quality of life, responsibility, job satisfaction, and being successful. Finally, the mature adult wants to understand why there is a need to learn something before he/she must learn the concept or skill (Knowles, 1989). The six assumptions set forth by the andragogy theory relate to the role middle school general education teachers play to create a more positive learning environment for students with EBDs in the general education classroom.

Nature of the Study

The study followed a basic qualitative research design, which provided the most thorough collection of data to answer the research questions. A basic qualitative research design helped to gain an understanding of teacher perceptions of teaching students with EBDs through interviews, observations, and field notes (Taguchi, 2018). A basic

qualitative research design allows an in-depth investigation of a small group of participants that is open ended and exploratory, leading to much information about behaviors, views, and thoughts (Taguchi, 2018). For these reasons, quantitative methods and mixed-methods studies were not chosen. Though there are advantages such as observing changes over time in quantitative research or triangulation and generating a variety of views through mixed-methods research (Taguchi, 2018), the basic qualitative case study was the best option considering that general education teachers' perceptions about educating students with EBDs were explored in the classroom setting.

Operational Definitions

The following terms will appear in this study.

Alternative education: The alternative educational setting is a learning environment that is in a separate facility designed to meet the needs of students whose needs cannot be met in the general education setting behaviorally and/or academically (Afacan & Wilkerson, 2019; Gagnon & Barber, 2015). They are settings in which the learning environment is separate but housed within the general education environment and is designed for specifically for students with academic or behavioral difficulties (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Behavioral intervention plan (BIP): A plan created using the information collected from a functional behavior assessment to address and change a negative behavior or behaviors (Collins & Zirkel, 2017).

Chronic disruptive behavior: Are classified as behaviors such as tantrums, physical aggression, extreme argumentativeness, stealing, and other forms of defiance in

which the student is resistant to authority displayed persistently (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2016).

Continuum of placement: Mandates that there must be alternative placements accessible to meet the needs of SWD, including regular education, special education classes, special education schools, and home and hospital instructional services (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004; Spencer, 2018).

Emotional and/or behavioral disorders: Are characterized behaviors such as an inability to learn, maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships, display of inappropriate behaviors in normal situations, an overall display of moods of unhappiness and depression, and a likelihood of developing physical symptoms of fear towards personal and school issues (Council for Exceptional Children, 2015; Patton, 2018).

Externalizing behaviors: Are behaviors directed at the external environment, such as acting out or aggression (American Psychological Association, 2018).

Free appropriate public education: Public schools are required to provide a free appropriate public education to children with disabilities as outlined by the Individuals with Disabilities Act (Davis 2019; Free Appropriate Public Education, 2012).

Functional behavioral assessment (FBA): An assessment to determine the cause or causes of a behavior or behaviors (Collins & Zirkel, 2017).

Individualized education plan (IEP): Is a legal educational document written for a student with a disability that is created, examined, and revised by an IEP team consisting of school personnel, parents, or therapists (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004; Spencer, 2018).

Internalizing behaviors: Are behaviors characterized within an individual's self, such as anxiety or depression (American Psychological Association, 2018).

Least restrictive environment: Is an education environment in which SWD will be educated with students who are not disabled to the maximum extent possible (Drysdale-LeBreton, 2018).

Leveled behavior system: A behavior system based on levels with criteria for each level that must be met to move to the next level. This system shapes negative behavior into positive behavior (Cihon et al., 2019).

Positive behavior intervention system: Is a conceptual framework implemented in school systems promoting positive academic and social skills success for all students using research based academic and behavioral interventions (Chitiyo & Mayo, 2018; Young, 2019).

Teaching strategies: A way of making decisions about planning and teaching that include characteristics of the learners, objectives, and preferences of the teacher to benefit a positive learning environment (Massachusetts Institute for Technology, 2020).

Assumptions

There are several assumptions associated with understanding general education teachers' perceptions of their knowledge on teaching students with EBDs. The first assumption is that a teacher's specified use of instructional academic and behavioral strategies relates to the success of the students in that classroom. Therefore, research may be limited due to the lack of monitoring of teacher effectiveness when teaching students with EBDs in the classroom setting. Another assumption is that many general education

teachers have not received training opportunities to assist them in creating a positive classroom environment for students with EBDs and their non-disabled peers. Perhaps general education teachers are provided with a variety of professional development opportunities and chose not to utilize the academic and behavioral strategies provided in the trainings. It is also possible that general educators may pick different professional development opportunities about their field of expertise rather than choose professional development opportunities related to students with EBDs.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of the study included interviews with 11 general education teachers at the middle school level within a school district. Middle school students begin to transition from one content area class to the next multiple times a day. Therefore, exploring perceptions general education teachers had about teaching students with EBDs in the classroom setting was relevant for these students to have a more successful transition to and from classes. It also guided in the understanding of what these teachers may need to improve instructional practices for students with EBDs. Although the identified problem is a subject of concern at the national level, conducting research on the knowledge general education teachers have about teaching students with EBDs at the national level is outside of the realm due to the amount of time. Therefore, using general education middle school teachers within a school district as the sample allowed me to identify a sample of teachers who taught students with EBDs from that school district with the possibility of applying the results at the school district level.

Limitations

This study had several limitations that could influence the results. First, the study took place within a school district located on the Eastern Coast of the United States. Subjects were chosen from the middle schools within that school district. The results of the study would be difficult to apply to elementary school general education teachers as well as high school teachers both within the school district and outside of that school district. Furthermore, whether general education teachers within the school district utilized academic and behavioral strategies they have learned to teach students with EBDs consistently was different for each participant. More importantly, the study only addressed middle school general education teachers' perceptions at the school district level. Additionally, participant involvement was limited to only 11 participants. There were 12 participants, but one participant dropped out because of lack of time. Others also did not respond to the invitation to participate despite multiple efforts to recruit more participants.

Significance of the Study

This basic qualitative research study explored middle school general education teachers' perceptions of their knowledge of teaching students with EBDs. There was a concern with general educators needing more training to adequately teach students with EBDs in the classroom (M. Houghlin, personal communication, April 26, 2017). Students with EBDs are now required to spend most of their day in the general education setting (Jackson et al., 2017). For example, only 35% of students with EBDs spent the majority of their day in the general education setting, but during the 2011–2012 school year,

44.1% of students with EBDs spent most of their day in the general education setting (Jackson et al., 2017). In 2014, only 46% of students with EBDs were included in the general education classroom for 80% of the school day (Freeman et al., 2019; Garwood, Brunsting, et al., 2014). Understanding general education teachers' perceptions of the knowledge they have of teaching students with EBDs may allow local school district leaders to plan and implement trainings committed to presenting positive academic and behavioral strategies for students with EBDs in their classrooms.

Academic progress for students with EBDs continues to be a concern for the field of education. Students with EBDs continue to exhibit academic achievement gaps in content areas such as reading and behavioral achievement that include internalizing and externalizing behaviors in the academic setting (Billingsley et al., 2018; Vostal & Lee, 2015; Young, 2019). Furthermore, positive teacher–student relationships in the form of positive praise directly affect the academic environment and learning success for students with EBDs (Floress et al., 2017). Providing general education teachers with training to effectively teach students with EBDs is a building block to creating these positive relationships (Floress et al., 2017; Sutherland & Oswald, 2005). Because it may be difficult to build a positive relationship with students whose behaviors are not understood and affect classroom instruction, it is important to gain an understanding of general education teachers' knowledge about teaching students with EBDs to develop professional development opportunities to address these teachers' needs.

Summary

A school district's officials communicated that general education teachers need additional training to teach students with EBDs in the classroom due to the academic discrepancy for students with EBDs in the general education classroom. Therefore, the purpose of the study was to identify possible causes in the academic achievement discrepancy for students with EBDs in the general education classroom. Teacher perceptions of their knowledge on teaching students with EBDs in the general education classroom were examined. Data were analyzed and coded in NVivo to indicate the significant themes identified through the study process. The conceptual framework, andragogy, guided the study. The conceptual framework discusses six assumptions of how adults learn: (a) self-concept, (b) experience, (c) readiness to learn, (d) the orientation of learning, (f) motivation to learn, and (e) relevance. The significance of this study may include teachers providing a more effective learning environment through appropriate professional development for teaching students with emotional and behavioral disorders.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

A problem was identified for academic and behavioral achievement in the general education classroom for students with EBDs when compared to their peers without disabilities. The deficits in academic and behavioral achievement in content area classes between students with EBDs and their non-disabled peers involves the amount of time students with EBDs receive instruction outside of the general education setting in academic content areas as a result of consistent disruptive behaviors. For instance, students with EBDs are placed in more restrictive environments, such as separate schools and residential settings; sent to the office; suspended; or expelled more often than their peers without disabilities (Deitrich et al., 2016; Wagner, Newman, et al., 2005, as cited in Murray, 2018). The purpose of this basic qualitative case study was to explore middle school general education teachers' perceptions of the knowledge they have of teaching students with EBDs in the classroom. Understanding teacher knowledge about teaching students with EBDs may help determine the strengths and weaknesses of these teachers, which can result in a positive learning environment for all students.

Literature Search Strategy

Multiple databases were used to identify publications on the topic of general education teachers' perceptions about the knowledge they have of teaching students with EBDs. These included the Walden University Library databases through Academic Research Complete, ERIC, ProQuest Central, PsycArticles, SAGE Premier, Science Journals, ScienceDirect, and Taylor and Francis Online. The search terms included *general education teacher knowledge, students with emotional disorders, professional*

development, training, and understanding of students with emotional disorders, and perceptions, attitudes, and behavior of general education teachers. I identified three themes through the literature review:

- General education teachers require additional training to teach students with EBDs effectively.
- General education teachers need additional training to prevent negative attitudes toward teaching students with EBDs.
- Lack of general education teacher knowledge to effectively teach students with EBDs could be a contributing factor to insufficient academic progress for students with EBDs in the classroom.

Conceptual Framework

Andragogy, an adult learning theory, guided this study because the perception of the knowledge that general education teachers have about teaching students with EBDs was the focal point of the study. Andragogy, created by Knowles (1980) in the 1970s, suggests that teachers benefit from being involved in the planning and evaluation of instruction. The ideal way for educators to learn is through acquiring knowledge in the setting of implementation (Knowles, 1980). Furthermore, educators must know why they need to learn strategies before they learn how to implement those strategies (Knowles, 1989). In addition, the prime mission for every adult educator is to guide individuals in satisfying their needs and achieve their goals, which relate to fulfillment and being successful (Knowles, 1980). It is important for educators to understand that learning has moved past learning “what we ought to know” (p. 28) to understanding that learning is a

“lifelong process and to acquire the skills of self-directed learning” (Knowles, 1980, p. 28). Educators have moved past being just instructors of remediation to helping their students achieve their full potential (Knowles, 1980).

Additional research shows that andragogy relates to six assumptions of adult learning: self-concept, experience, readiness to learn, the orientation of learning, motivation to learn, and relevance (Knowles, 1980). Knowles (1989) identified self-concept as adults wanting to move from being dependent beings to self-directing individuals, and once this is reached adults develop a psychological need to become capable adults in charge of their own lives. Further, educators experience students who have diverse encounters with the world around them, and this presents difficulties for the typical classroom, as students require diverse teaching methods to address different learning styles. Readiness to learn explains that as individuals grow and develop, they become ready to learn tasks that are directly related to what is needed to be successful in everyday life. As individuals mature, orientation of learning also becomes important, as learning becomes centered on solving problems associated with life. Furthermore, the mature person is motivated to learn when it is directly related to self-esteem, quality of life, responsibility, job satisfaction, and being successful. Finally, the mature adult wants to understand why there is a need to learn something before he/she must learn the concept or skill (Knowles, 1989). The six assumptions set forth by the andragogy theory relate to the role middle school general education teachers play to create a more positive learning environment for students with EBDs in the general education classroom.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

The literature review is organized to illustrate the need for general education teachers to be provided with additional training to teach students with EBDs. First, I will discuss the research on the overall need for training general education teachers to teach students with EBDs. I also address specific strategies identified by the literature that either help or hinder teacher effectiveness. Second, I will discuss the research demonstrating that general education teachers training, attitudes, and perceptions of teaching students with EBDs are related to one another. Additionally, there is mention of how negative teacher attitudes and perceptions lead to the use of negative teaching strategies when teaching students with EBDs in the general education classroom. Finally, there is a discussion of recent research on how lack of achievement for students with EBDs in the general education setting can be a direct result of the lack of training general education teachers have to teach students with EBDs.

General Education Teachers and Additional Training

The literature review includes an exploration of general education teachers' level of professional development in teaching students with EBDs to address lack of academic and behavioral progress. Students with EBDs typically display challenging behaviors causing removal from the general education classroom and interfering with access to the general education curriculum (Bradley, et al., 2008; Ennis, 2015; Rice & Yen, 2010; Sundeen, 2018; Wiley et al., 2010). In addition, students with EBDs suffer academically due to the amount out of school suspensions, dropout rates, and being sent to more restrictive environments (McLeskey et al., 2012; Murray, 2018; Wagner, Newman, et al.,

2005). Students with EBDs thus fall behind their peers without disabilities academically, and general education teachers need additional academic and behavioral training to teach students with EBDs (Ennis, 2015; Sundeen, 2018). General educators need to be provided professional development, especially in the form of praise enabling them to improve instructional and behavioral practices (Floress et al., 2017).

Students with EBDs disrupt the learning environment, but teachers of these students reported many concerns about not having proper knowledge and experience in classroom management strategies to improve academic performance for these students (Garwood et al., 2016). A review of National Statistics from the Department of Education showed that students with EBDs represent a high percentage of out of school suspensions, causing instruction to take place in alternative settings (U.S. Department of Education, 2012; Zoloski et al., 2016). Though the Individuals with Disabilities Act (2004) mandated that SWD cannot be suspended for more than 10 school days per school year or they must have a manifestation meeting to determine if the behaviors are a result of their disabilities, students with EBDs have been excluded 2 times as much from general education classrooms as their non-disabled peers (Freeman et al., 2019). Furthermore, during the 2013–2014 only 54.7% of students with EBDs graduated from high school, only 46% of students with EBDs were included in the general education classroom 80% or more of the school day and were twice as likely to be placed in alternative learning environments due to serious bodily injury, drugs, and weapon offenses (Freeman et al., 2019). Constant disruptive behaviors, aggression, and oppositional behaviors not only disrupt the learning environment; these behaviors cause

these students to fall behind academically at or below the 25th percentile in academics (Cambell et al., 2018; Gage et al., 2017). The consistent display of behavioral issues, aggression, and defiant behavior illustrates the lack of success students with EBDs have in the classroom.

The academic achievement gap between students with EBDs and those without disabilities becomes more substantial as these students reach higher grade levels. Students with EBDs suffer from considerable academic deficits of 25% to 97% below that of their peers without disabilities in the areas of reading and mathematics (Scott & Burn, 2018, as cited in Reid et al., 2004). Students with EBDs also display higher deficits in literacy skills, which adds to disruptive behaviors that impede with task demands (Cambell et al., 2018; Vostal & Lee, 2015). Students with EBDs continue to fall behind students without disabilities academically in the middle school general education classroom as a result of the amount of time they spend outside of the general education classroom setting.

Need for Additional Training in Specific Strategy Instruction to Increase Effectiveness

There is a need for overall additional training in specific instruction to be provided for general education teachers for academic and instructional practices to be effective for students with EBDs (Albrecht, Johns, et al., 2009; State et al., 2018). General education teachers lack the essential preparation skills to support students with EBDs in the classroom, both academically and behaviorally (Cook, Rao, et al., 2017). More importantly, general education teachers have expressed concerns about lacking the necessary strategies and skills to effectively teach students with EBDs in their classrooms

(Scott & Burt, 2018; Westling, 2010). As a result, students with EBDs in the general education classroom are being placed at-risk for academic failure or are more often being placed in alternative learning environments when compared to their peers without disabilities (Davis, 2019; Sprouls et al., 2015). Students with EBDs also continue to demonstrate low academic achievement as a result of teachers struggling to teach students with EBDs (Erickson & Gresham, 2019; Nelson et al., 2004).

Training to Address Individualized Instruction

Students with EBDs require more individualized instruction in the general education setting; however, these teachers do not have the tools to provide this type of instruction, causing unfavorable results for students with EBDs in the general education setting (Scott & Burn, 2018). These teachers often report feeling overwhelmed with an exorbitant amount of responsibilities, and instructional opportunities for students with EBDs are insufficient when compared to their peers without disabilities (Bettini et al., 2015; Davis, 2019). General education teachers should have instructional and behavioral practices that are research-based when teaching students with EBDs to maximize success for these students (Jackson et al., 2017; Stormont et al., 2011). These teachers must have appropriate educational training and professional development opportunities in successful academic and behavioral strategies (Deiterich et al., 2016); however, funding may have an impact on the amount of academic and behavioral trainings provided to teachers for teaching students with EBDs.

Training to Address Behavior

General education teachers also need training to avert and confront problem behaviors (Kern, 2015; Patton, 2018). Providing adequate training for general education teachers in conducting FBAs may decrease inappropriate behaviors such as outbursts, arguing, putting hands on other students, leaving assigned areas without permission, and other disruptive behaviors taking place in the classroom (Losinski et al., 2015; Young, 2019). Providing teachers with evidence-based practices such as positive supports, mentoring and relationship building supports, and accuracy of intervention execution may also improve academic success for students with EBDs (Kern, 2015; Kirby, 2017; Raigoza, 2019; Regan & Michaud, 2011). Teachers of students with EBDs need training in strategies using praise for students with EBDs to experience success in the general education classroom and minimize disruptive and/or off-task behavior (Floress et al., 2017). Additionally, general education teachers need training on how to use academic and behavioral strategy supports efficiently to maximize educational growth for students with EBDs (Garwood & Ampuja, 2019). But many general education teachers do not implement researched-based instructional and behavioral strategies such as self-monitoring to improve academic and behavioral success for students with EBDs (Cook, Rao, et al., 2017). More training is needed for general education teachers to address the achievement gap between students with EBDs and students without disabilities (Losinski et al., 2015; Young, 2019).

Need for Training to Address Achievement Gaps

Most students with EBDs score well below grade level in the area of reading (Burke et al., 2015; Cambell et al., 2018; Wagner, Newman et al., 2005), but teachers are

not taught research-based strategies to improve academic and behavioral success, causing students with EBDs to function at a much lower level than their peers without disabilities at the same age level (Burke et al., 2015; Sundeen, 2018; Vaughn et al., 2002). As students with EBDs enter middle school, the reading content creates a challenge that makes it more difficult to comprehend in middle school, which widens to at least 3.5 grade levels below non-disabled peers (Burke et al., 2015; Cambell et al., 2018; Gage et al., 2017). However, students with EBDs are not taught the basic reading and writing skills to utilize basic organizational structures to cohesively read and answer writing prompts required for writing essays (Chui et al., 2017; Harris et al., 2008). Students with EBDs have also been found to be functioning below grade level in mathematics, with only 7% of students with EBDs scoring proficient for the required math skills needed when leaving 8th grade (Billingsley et al., 2018; The Nations Report Card, 2015). Therefore, the need for general education teachers to receive training in specific instructional strategies affects students with EBDs involvement in the general education classroom setting and is essential for students with EBDs to be successful (Garwood & Ampuja, 2019).

Additionally, general education teachers often leave the teaching profession as a result of not having the proper training to teach students with EBDs (Clinton, 2016). Teachers of students with EBDs have the highest rate of deterioration due to the constant display of inappropriate and disruptive behaviors from these students in their classrooms (Clinton, 2016). The interconnection between problem behaviors and teacher preparedness to teach these students is connected to teacher debilitation, stress, and

indisposition (Martella & Marchand-Martella, 2015; Patton, 2018). But general education teachers provided with trainings in video modeling interventions for students with EBDs has improved behavior among those students creating a positive learning environment for teachers, students with EBDs, and their peers without disabilities (Clinton, 2016).

Highlighting the Benefits of Training with Examples

Education teachers who have attended professional development programs on designing, implementing, and evaluating academic and behavioral interventions made significant improvements with classroom academic and behavioral instruction when teaching students with EBDs (Lane et al., 2015; Young, 2019), which demonstrates the need for the consistent use of effective academic and behavioral interventions by general education teachers to promote success for students with EBDs. For example, there is a training called The My Teaching Partner-Secondary Program that teaches general education teachers how to reflect on the emotional, organizational, and instructional practices of their classrooms with the help of coaches to guide them through the process that has illustrated academic and behavioral progress for students with EBDs in the general education classroom (Gregory et al., 2017). Providing teachers with training in activities requiring the use of hands-on activities that are inquiry-based have also been beneficial for students with EBDs to effectively learn in the classroom (Taylor, 2016). General education teachers who can effectively implement academic and behavioral interventions, assess, and analyze those interventions create more opportunities for students with EBDs to experience success (Davis, 2019; Losinski et al., 2015).

It is necessary for general education teachers to be provided with a variety of evidence-based academic and behavioral practices to teach students with EBDs in a variety of general education settings (Beam & Gershwin-Mueller, 2017; Burnes & Ysseldyke, 2009). General education teachers need access to more trainings in effective academic and behavioral strategies as well as training in strategies to promote positive social skills to change negative behaviors of students with EBDs in their classrooms (Albrecht, Mather, et al., 2015; Marsh, 2017). Due to the diverse needs of students with EBDs, general education teachers need to be equipped to be able to instruct a diverse group of students with EBDs academically and behaviorally (Gage et al., 2017). Students with EBDs continue to experience negative outcomes academically and behaviorally in the general education classroom, illustrating the need for these teachers to be provided with successful academic and behavioral strategies to promote success for these students (Dunn et al., 2017). Lack of teacher training to educate students with EBDs, both academically and behaviorally contributes to students with EBDs performing poorly in all academic content areas (Weeden et al., 2016).

General Education Teachers' Training, Attitudes, and Perceptions of Students with EBDs

The second theme identified is that general education teachers' attitudes, and perceptions about teaching students with EBDs is a direct result of the lack of academic and behavioral knowledge those teachers have about teaching students with EBDs. Current research indicates that general educators are more likely to state they do not have the proper academic and behavioral training to teach students with EBDs alongside their

peers without disabilities (Gilmour, 2019). More importantly, general education teachers communicate that students with EBDs present some of the greatest obstacles on an everyday basis (Scott & Burt, 2018). Furthermore, the negative feelings general education teachers have about teaching students with EBDs does impact the academic and behavioral learning of students with EBDs in an unfavorable manner in the general education classroom setting (Barton-Arwood et al., 2016).

Training and Attitudes

General education teacher attitudes of students with EBDs have a direct connection to their attitudes about teaching them in the classroom. Specifically, general education teachers' attitudes of teaching students with EBDs is adverse due to feeling unprepared to teach these students (Barton-Arwood et al., 2016). However, current research does indicate that perceptions of teaching students with EBDs changed for the better when those teachers received proper academic and behavioral training for successfully teaching students with EBDs in their classrooms (Barton-Arwood et al., 2016). Despite these findings, many general education teachers continue to believe their instructional and behavioral strategies are ineffective with students displaying negative behavior, including students with EBD (Chafouleas et al., 2010; Wills et al., 2018). For example, teachers implement the use of aversive, negative, and reactive discipline strategies when correcting negative behavior from students with EBDs (Garwood & Vernon-Feagans, et al., 2017); in addition, general education teachers also communicated the need for training in positive, proactive academic and behavioral strategies to teach students with EBD in their classrooms.

An analysis of ongoing research indicates that general education teachers may need training in learning and using positive proactive academic and behavioral strategies when teaching students with EBDs in their classrooms (Brigham et al., 2016; McKenna et al., 2019). For example, suggestions for general education teachers' trainings included strategies that incorporated the use of energetic, preventative, evidence-based classroom management strategies through behavior management supports from *Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports* (PBIS) (Heddin, 2017). However, many teachers are not provided the opportunity for trainings in positive, proactive academic and behavioral strategies for teaching students with EBDs due to other types of trainings taking priority (Heddin, 2017). The consensus is that certain school personnel have been trained (Special Education Teachers) for teaching students with EBDs, and general education teachers already have mounting instructional necessities they must attend to in their classrooms (Heddin, 2017). Nonetheless, general education teachers may need training in timely academic and behavioral screenings with appropriate academic and behavioral preventative strategies to incorporate in the classroom to allow students with EBDs to experience success so as not to make hasty decisions regarding the behaviors encountered within the classroom. (Heddin, 2017). One issue that has emerged is that students with EBDs at the secondary level have serious deficits in academic, social, emotional, and behavioral capabilities (Hollo & Burt, 2018; Hollo & Chow, 2015); therefore, causing a possible need for general education teachers to receive training in using standards-based instructional academic and behavioral strategies in combination with positive, proactive, academic, and behavioral strategies.

General education teachers also may need training in using standards-based academic and behavioral methods for students with EBDs in combination with positive, proactive academic and behavioral strategies through PBIS supports and/or functional behavioral interventions (Carta et al., 1990; Trussel et al., 2018). Particularly, teachers of students with EBDs expressed concerns regarding adequate preparation to teach students with EBDs using effective academic and behavioral and/or evidence-based methods in their classrooms (Cooper et al., 2018; Helfin & Bullock, 1999; Lopes et al., 2004). Therefore, the wearing down of teachers is attributed to chronic disruptive behaviors from students, including students with EBDs within their classrooms (Floress et al., 2018; Ingersoll, 2001); however, the need for academic and behavioral strategy training also affects the perceptions general education teachers have about teaching students with EBDs.

Training and Perceptions

General education teachers' academic and behavioral trainings for teaching students with EBDs may have an impact on their perceptions of teaching these students. Specifically, general education teachers were found to perceive themselves as unprepared to teach students with EBDs in the classroom with their peers without disabilities (Scott & Burt, 2018; Westling, 2010). For example, teachers believe they are not prepared to teach basic writing skills or organizational structures to students with EBD effectively (Chui et al., 2017; Harris et al., 2008). The issue that has arisen from current literature is that students with EBDs are found to be less successful in the general education environment due to teachers' negative level of feedback to students with EBDs in their

classrooms (Mitchell et al., 2019; Scott et al., 2011). For example, general education teachers not provided with appropriate preventative academic and behavioral strategies to effectively teach students caused negative school climates and teacher dissatisfaction, resulting in poor academic and behavioral achievement for students with EBDs (La Salle et al., 2018; Thap et al., 2013). More importantly, general education teachers reported feeling unprepared to teach students with EBDs in the classroom, due to having inadequate knowledge of behavioral practices for minimizing negative behavior, as well as strategies for instructing students with EBDs successfully (Davis, 2019; Stough et al., 2015).

Specifically, teachers educating students with EBDs experience a great deal of negative reactions toward students with EBDs, as a result of their behavior and attachments issues (Katrien-Koenen et al., 2019). Even more important, teachers of these students communicated feelings of being unprepared, overwhelmed, overly stressed, and burned out as a result of the lack of knowledge they have about teaching students with EBDs academically and behaviorally (Means, 2019; Scott et al., 2011; Stough et al., 2015). Ongoing research analysis also revealed that many teachers interviewed expressed that they need more training in classroom management techniques in order to maintain positive relationships with students with EBDs (Mann, 2018; Stough et al., 2015). However, general education teachers also believe that students with EBD behavior is a result of parenting and being lazy (Young & Martinez, 2016). Finally, overall feelings of inadequacy for teaching students with EBDs is common among general education teachers teaching these students. Specifically, general education teachers' communicated

that they felt inadequately prepared to teach students with EBDs in their classrooms (Burke et al., 2015; Mann, 2018; Mooney et al., 2004). Nonetheless, these perceptions about teaching students with EBDs were a contributing factor to poor teacher-student relationships leading to negative academic and behavioral outcomes (Katrien-Koenen et al., 2019); additionally, the need for general education teachers to receive training in academic and behavioral strategies conducive for students with EBDs relates to the low academic and behavioral achievement students with EBDs experience in the general education classroom.

The Need for Knowledge: A Contribution to Students with EBD Achievement

The final theme identified from current research is that the lack of academic and behavioral achievement for students with EBDs contributes to the insufficient academic and behavioral training general education teachers have for teaching those students. Specifically, students with EBDs experience less academic success in the general education setting, resulting in the removal from regular education to receive instruction in alternative learning environments that are more restrictive, suspensions, or other disciplinary actions (Zoloski et al., 2016). As a result of this, students with EBDs leaving middle school are already performing at least three grade levels below their peers without disabilities in all academic areas (Billingsley et al., 2018; Garwood et al., 2016; Kaya et al., 2015; Young, 2019). A contributing factor to this discrepancy is that students with EBDs internalize and externalize their behaviors creating difficulties for general education teachers to manage in their classrooms.

Training in Specific Strategies

Particularly, students with EBDs have higher incidents of demonstrating internalizing and externalizing behaviors, as well as lower academic achievement when compared to their peers without disabilities in the general education classroom (Buchanan et al., 2016). As a result of these internalizing and externalizing of behaviors, teachers need training in specific strategies focusing on partnerships between the school and family to aid in positive academic and behavioral achievement for students with EBDs (Buchanan et al., 2016); however, students with EBDs also have very little success in the general education setting due to these teachers needing more training in academic and behavioral strategies to teach these students successfully.

A review of current research emphasizes that students with EBDs academic and behavioral achievement decreases when compared to their peers without disabilities, and reading abilities worsen as those students' progress through school due to missing valuable instruction as a result of their behaviors (Burke et al., 2015; Cambell et al., 2018). Moreover, students with EBDs are more likely to drop out of school at much higher rates than their peers without disabilities as a result of the lack of academic and behavioral success they encounter in the general education setting (Buchanan et al., 2016). Therefore, instructional methods utilized by general education teachers should involve very specific and intentional strategies supporting academic, social, emotional, and behavioral success (Hunter et al., 2017).

Current research findings also continue to demonstrate that general education teachers do not have these specific intentional strategies to successfully teach students with EBDs in their classrooms. Particularly, the instructional and behavioral programs

used in general education classrooms are not effective for meeting the needs of students with EBDs, due to students with EBDs performing well below grade level (Bradley et al., 2008; Mitchell et al., 2019). Students with EBDs academic and behavioral achievement was found to be influenced by the quality of instructional practices utilized in the general education classroom by those classroom teachers, as a result of those teachers struggling to adapt core academic and behavioral instruction (McKenna et al., 2019); more importantly, the need for general education teachers to receive academic and behavioral strategy training also impacts communication between general education teachers and students with EBD unfavorably.

Student and Teacher Relationships

Communication and/or student-teacher relationships between students with EBD and general education teachers declined as a result of the academic and behavioral training needs for teaching those students, and further, resulted in poor achievement for students with EBD (Graziano et al., 2007; Van Loan & Garwood, 2020). More importantly, students with EBDs consistently perform below grade level, fail in school, and are referred for suspension more often than their peers without disabilities (McDaniel et al., 2017; Wagner, Kutash, et al., 2005). Similarly, students with EBDs and teacher relationships decline as a result of consistent misbehavior, causing removal from the classroom to be instructed in alternative settings (Kern, 2015; Kirby, 2017; Raigoza, 2019). Furthermore, negative teacher responses to students with EBDs in their classrooms caused a breakdown in the student-teacher relationship, also resulting in those

students to disconnect from their schooling (Evans & Lester, 2012; Kern, 2015; Marsh, 2017).

Drop-Out Rates for Students with EBDs

Additionally, examination of the literature revealed that students with EBDs have a higher rate of failing, dropping out, or expulsion when compared to their peers without disabilities as a result of poor student-teacher relationships, and the academic and behavioral training needs of general education teachers for teaching students with EBDs in their classrooms (Cook, Collins, et al., 2015; Marsh, 2017). The concern is that students with EBDs make up a very small population of the general education population, and their success in the general education classroom is limited (Weeden et al., 2016).

Students with EBDs only make up 3% to 6% of the student population (Weeden et al., 2016). However, students with EBDs have far fewer opportunities to participate in classroom activities as a result of the behaviors they exhibit, in combination with, the lack of academic and behavioral knowledge teachers have to communicate and educate them effectively (Weeden et al., 2016). Furthermore, findings from the literature examination suggest that students with EBDs are more likely to drop out of school at much higher rates than their peers without disabilities as a result of the lack of academic success they encounter in the general education setting (Buchanan et al., 2016). In short, teachers in the general education setting may need to be provided with more academic and behavioral training to better serve students with EBDs in the general education setting if these students are to be successful.

Summary

A review of the current literature regarding general education teacher perspectives of teaching students with EBDs revealed several factors influencing the perceptions these teachers have of students with EBDs. Students with EBDs are being placed in the general education classroom as a result of the guidelines placed upon the education system through free appropriate public education. However, general education teachers are not properly trained to teach students with EBDs alongside their non-disabled peers. Furthermore, current research suggests that students with EBDs are performing significantly below their peers without disabilities academically and behaviorally, as a result of the training that is needed for general education teachers to successfully teach these students.

Moreover, my research suggests that general education teacher perceptions of teaching students with EBDs is related to the training they need in academic and behavioral strategies to promote success for these students. Finally, the negative perceptions general education teachers have of teaching students with EBDs and the training they need to teach these students, students with EBDs are more likely to perform three or more grade levels below their peers without disabilities, be placed in an alternative learning environment, or drop out of school at higher rates when compared to their peers without disabilities. Students with EBDs make-up a very small percentage of the total student population when compared to their peers without disabilities. Current researchers suggest that, if provided with the proper training in academic and behavioral

strategies to teach students with EBDs, teacher knowledge improves as well as the success of the students.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative case study was to understand middle school general education teachers' perceptions about teaching students with EBDs to understand if additional training is needed to teach these students efficiently. SWD, including students with EBDs, are affected academically (Burke et al., 2015; Spencer, 2018; Wagner, Kutash, et al., 2005) and are more likely to have higher rates of truancy, suspension, expulsions, and being placed in alternative settings such as residential treatment programs due to their behaviors (Deiterich et al., 2016). Students with EBDs also have a higher rate of being hospitalized or institutionalized as a result of their behaviors, which contributes to the poor academic achievement these students experience (Deiterich et al., 2016). Therefore, understanding teacher knowledge about teaching students with EBDs may lead to increased student achievement.

Research Design and Rationale

This study followed a basic qualitative design that provided the most thorough collection of data to answer the research questions:

Research Question 1: What knowledge do middle school general education teachers have about teaching students with EBDs?

Research Question 2: How are behaviors of students with EBDs addressed in the general education setting during instructional time?

Research Question 3: What additional trainings to teach students with EBDs would be beneficial for creating a more positive learning environment?

A qualitative research design allowed for rich, in-depth knowledge to gain an understanding of what teachers know about teaching students with EBDs. Teachers who participated in the study completed an interview discussing academic and behavioral strategies utilized in the general education classroom when teaching students with EBDs as well as thoughts and perceptions about teaching students with EBDs in the classroom. Participants were purposefully chosen to participate in the interview process as participants were general education teachers in the middle school setting. Due to COVID-19 restrictions and guidelines outlined by the Centers for Disease Control, participants were not allowed to meet with me in person. School districts were closed for in-person instruction, and all students were being taught in an online platform.

A document analysis was also initiated of professional development opportunities offered during the 2019–2020 school year, which provided insight into teaching students with EBDs in the general education classroom. The document analysis was conducted to triangulate responses given from interviewees regarding professional development opportunities offered for teaching students with EBDs by the school district. Data analysis consisted of identifying significant themes with codes using the NVivo program to discuss in the final report.

Research Tradition

This study followed a basic qualitative research design, as qualitative research enables the researcher to provide details in an information-rich narrative to explain the problem as well as the findings (Kozleski, 2017). Qualitative research also allows the researcher to make changes as new information is revealed as well as adapt and improve

educational practice and policy (Kozleski, 2017). The qualitative researcher is not bound to making a hypothesis regarding what the outcome of the study will be after conducting research. A basic qualitative research study also allows the researcher to collect data using smaller sampling sizes (Rahman, 2016). Furthermore, the researcher is able to elicit deeper response from participants based upon the information that is being collected (Rahman, 2016). As the researcher, I was able to choose participants to interview based on the experience they had as middle school general education teachers who taught or continue to teach students with EBDs in their classroom settings.

Basic Qualitative Research Design Rationale

This study attempted to understand the issues involving the learning deficits between students with EBDs and their non-disabled peers by learning about general education teachers' perceptions they have about teaching these students. The basic qualitative research design was an appropriate choice for this study in that the study was completed in a structured environment, and I was in control of the study (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). The basic qualitative research design was appropriate for this study over other types of qualitative research such as ethnography, phenomenology, and grounded theory. The sole purpose of an ethnographic study is to unveil cultural aspects of a particular culture (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). The purpose of this study had nothing to do with studying culture. Second, the motives for conducting a phenomenology study is to understand or uncover a person's lived experiences and how those experiences shape that person's life, such as in domestic violence (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). It was not suggested in this study that general education teachers'

experiences shape the way they teach in their classrooms. Finally, conducting a grounded theory study would not be beneficial, considering that this type of study is used to focus on effects of behavior (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). Therefore, the basic qualitative research design was the most appropriate choice for this study.

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher in this study was to collect information by exploring middle school general education teachers' perceptions that they have of teaching students with EBDs in the classroom. In qualitative research, the researcher aids in understanding the study topic and the quality of the study by collecting the views of the participants (Kelly, 2017). My role as the researcher was also to be continuously reflexive and reflective. It was important to be aware of my own experiences, reasoning, and impact on the research process (Rahiem et al., 2016). Furthermore, it was essential for my role as the researcher to be "thoughtful and analytical" with the information that is collected from each participant (Rahiem et al., 2016). It was my goal to conduct myself in such a manner to avoid biases with general education teachers based on my own ideas as a special education teacher within the school district. Additionally, to avoid bias, participants were asked to review the results of their individual interviews for the purpose of determining whether my interpretations were representative of their actual knowledge of teaching students with EBDs. Lastly, the chosen middle schools were located outside of my own teaching environment to establish my role as an information seeker, to ensure validity, and minimize any biases I may have as a special education teacher within the local area school district.

Methodology

My study involved specific participants within a school district. Participants must have taught students with EBDs in their general education classrooms in order to participate in the study. Participants were asked to participate in a qualitative interview. The date and times of the individual interviews were based on the availability of the participants and were set accordingly. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, participants were offered three options for completing the interview: phone, email, or video conferencing using the video platform of their choice. Participants were assigned numbers rather than names to ensure confidentiality.

District-wide data on professional development opportunities offered for implementing academic and instructional strategies for teaching students with EBDs during the 2019–2020 school year were also analyzed to determine if appropriate opportunities were provided for general education teachers to attend. School district personnel were contacted to obtain a list of all the professional development opportunities offered during the 2019–2020 school year to general education teachers for teaching students with EBDs in the general education classroom. The types of professional developments were analyzed as well as where, when, and to whom the professional developments were offered. The district-wide data on professional development opportunities offered academic and behavioral strategies for teaching students with EBDs, and the interview responses from participants provided triangulation between what participants perceived about the knowledge they had about teaching students with EBDs in their classrooms.

Participant Selection Strategy

The chosen participants of this study were middle school general education teachers who teach in any of the four content areas (mathematics, English, social studies, and science) in three different middle school settings. Participants must have recently taught students with EBDs in their classroom settings. The rationale for choosing middle school general education teachers was due to students with EBDs beginning to transition from the four main content areas and receiving their instruction from a variety of teachers; therefore, students with EBDs encounter a variety of academic and behavioral teaching methods utilized within each content area classroom by the general education teachers teaching those content areas. Students with EBDs also begin to encounter the different personalities and teaching styles displayed by those general education teachers instructing in the four content areas in the general education setting.

Selection and Rationale of the Sampling Strategy

The sampling strategy used for this study was purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling was the most appropriate sampling strategy to utilize since participants are chosen based on the knowledge they have to provide a deeper understanding of the situations around them (Farrugia, 2019; Gentles et al., 2015). The study focused on general education content area teachers in middle school. These teachers must have taught students with EBDs alongside their non-disabled peers in recent years. Teachers needed to have at least obtained a bachelor's degree in the field of education. Teacher certification must have met the requirements for teaching middle school and the content

area that is the teacher's current placement. Teachers should have at least had students with EBDs for 1 school year to meet the requirements of this study.

Number of Participants

There was a total of 11 general education teachers across the four academic disciplines of English, science, social studies, and mathematics, in Grades 6 through 8 within three school settings that participated in this study. Allowing fewer than 10 participants to participate in the study would not have provided enough information to adequately explore general education teachers' perceptions of the knowledge they of teaching students with EBDs in their classrooms. For example, if a study involves a survey for that survey to be accurate, valid and provide adequate information to review there must be at least 12 respondents to the survey within the study (Weller et al., 2018). The study did not involve a survey, but it did involve an interview session with each participant. Therefore, the same guideline applied to the number of participants completing an interview.

Participants from a school district were chosen to participate in the study. The criteria for participation in this study was that participants must have taught students with EBDs in their general education classrooms in recent years. Choosing a sample of participants from a school district allowed data to be triangulated during the analysis process due to there being multiple sources (multiple participants) of data that were collected and analyzed. A letter explaining the significance of the study as well as permission to participate in the study were sent out electronically to teachers within the school district on four different occasions. The letter confirmed that all participant

information was confidential as well as interview responses being anonymous. The invitation to participate allowed teachers to choose the method of interview completion as well as dates and times of availability to complete the interview. Teachers were asked to respond through email if they agreed to participate in the study. Each time an electronic submission was sent a few more teachers would agree to participate. It took multiple electronic communications with teachers before there were enough participants to allow for trustworthiness of the study. Originally 12 teachers responded, but one participant dropped out due to time constraints for completing the interview questions. Of the 11 participants who completed the interview, a total of seven of the participants completed the interview electronically, whereas the remaining participants (four) completed the interview by telephone.

Specific Procedures for How Participants were Identified, Contacted, and Recruited

It was essential to seek proper approval to conduct and implement this study. Permission from the school district had already been granted. After an initial email, the chief academic advisor for the school district informed me that there was a permission to conduct a study form that must be filled out and returned to him for approval, which I completed and returned for review. The form was approved by the chief academic advisor as well as the principal of the middle school building in which I currently teach. Once the form was approved by both individuals, I moved forward with the next step in the study, asking for permission to conduct a study within the school district. This next step involved getting permission from middle school principals to contact general education teachers within their building. The letter included the purpose of the study,

why the research was essential to the school district, data collection procedures, and the criteria for participation in the study.

Once middle school principals from the school district gave approval to contacting teachers within their school buildings, a second letter was drafted and sent to general education teachers asking for their consent to participate in the study. The letter included the purpose of the study, its importance, as well as how data collection would occur. The letter explained the specific requirements for teachers to participate in the study. Teacher confidentiality was also discussed in the letter to ensure teachers that their participation was voluntary and that their responses would be anonymous. To ensure anonymity of participant responses, all teachers who participated in the study were assigned a number. These assigned numbers eliminated the use of names throughout data collection, data analysis, and the final report. Finally, permission from the university institution review board (approval no. 07-22-20-0180557) was obtained in order to complete the study within the designated school districts following COVID-19 Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines. Therefore, participants had to be given a choice of completing the interview by phone, video platform, or by email. An invitation explaining these options was sent to participants once they agreed to participate in the study.

Instrumentation

The interview questions were guided by identified research questions for understanding teacher knowledge of teaching students with EBDs (see Appendix). The interview questions consisted of 10 items found to be relevant to the literature review. All participants completed an individual interview session. Seven participants completed the

interview questions electronically. Four participants completed the interview by telephone conference. The sole purpose of the interviews were to obtain more in-depth information from participants. However, it was not permitted for any of the participants to meet at a designated time and location to interview due to the outlined COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. Therefore, interviews had to be individualized and meet CDC guidelines.

Procedures to Establish Content Validity

Expert Panel

Four local area experts in the field of special education reviewed the interview questions that were created through the findings from the literature review. It was explained to the expert panel that the interview questions further serve in the collection of qualitative data in the form of a case study to obtain information for determining teacher knowledge of teaching students with EBDs. The four expert individuals have been involved in the field of special education for at least five years.

The first chosen expert was a principal within the designated school district. The second expert individual was and still is directly involved with special education within the school district. The third special education specialist chosen was and continues to be a supervisor of the regional programs involving students with emotional disorders. The fourth specialist was and continues to be a qualified special education teacher of students with EBDs. Each specialist reviewed the interview questions, and deemed the interview questions as appropriate for the study.

Establish Sufficiency of Data Collection Procedures to Answer Research Questions

Establishing adequacy of data collection procedures to ensure trustworthiness of a study is an essential piece of the basic qualitative study puzzle. The current research required two separate data collection procedures. These procedures included: a researcher document analysis of district-wide in-service trainings offered to general education teachers, and an interview with each participant. The purpose of collecting data from each participant was to establish a clear understanding of teacher perceptions of their knowledge for teaching students with EBDs in the general education classroom.

Data Collection Instruments

Interview

The interview consisted of 10 open-ended questions. The expectation was for participants to provide rich information through well thought out responses, not provide yes or no answers. Doing so would have caused the study to be incomplete and unreliable. Questions that are poorly formulated do not receive high response rates causing data to be limited and lack accuracy because nothing new has been added to contemporary issues (Roberts, 2020; Tait & Voepel-Lewis, 2015). Therefore, an effective interview should have an objective, as well as a variety of options for responses from the interview questions to create meaningful knowledge (Roberts, 2020; Tait & Voepel-Lewis, 2015). All 11 participated in an individual interview that followed CDC guidelines outlined during the COVID-19 pandemics. Designated times and whether to complete interviews by phone, email, or video conferencing were chosen based upon the availability of the participants. If participants chose to complete the interview

electronically, 14 days was allotted for each participant to adequately answer interview questions and return them electronically to the researcher.

Document Analysis

A document analysis was conducted to determine district-wide trainings that were offered to general education teachers within a school district through the school district website for the 2019-2020 school year. In a basic qualitative study, document analysis is utilized for the purpose of helping with data triangulation (Morris, 2018). Therefore, reviewing current learning opportunities offered to general education teachers assisted in understanding possible needs for additional training. The document review helped to eliminate any biases, especially; if the review lead to a common explanation (Morris, 2018).

Procedures for Recruitment and Participation

General education teacher recruitment took place once school building principals gave permission to contact their teachers. A letter explaining the purpose, procedures, and confidentiality of the study was sent through email to all middle school general education teachers currently teaching a content area within a school district's middle schools, and who recently taught students with EBDs alongside their non-disabled peers. An invitation to participate in the study was also included providing further details for the interview. Ross et al., (2018) referenced *The Belmont report* in which researchers must respect the rights of the participants being recruited for a study. It must be ensured that participants will endure minimal harm, as well as the study benefiting society in a larger context (Ross et al., 2018). Teachers were asked to review the information in the letter,

the invitation to participate in an interview, and respond in email within 14 days whether they agreed to participate in the study. Fourteen days was determined to be a sufficient amount of time for teachers to evaluate and determine whether they would like to participate in the study. Once all participants agreed to participate in the study, interviews were scheduled according to the availability of each participant with the method of choice on how he/she wanted to complete the interview. Finally, assurance of confidentiality was reiterated; each teacher would be referred to as a number to ensure respect for participants as outlined in *The Belmont Report* for human subjects referenced from Ross et al., (2018).

Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis is an essential aspect of both qualitative and quantitative research studies, although data analysis methods are quite different (Farghaly, 2018). Data must be thoroughly analyzed to determine a deeper understanding of the outcome of the investigation in qualitative research (Farghaly, 2018). Data analysis of this study involved analysis of interview responses to determine important themes, as well as district wide professional development opportunities offered to general education teachers for successfully teaching students with EBDs academically and behaviorally in the general education classroom. The purpose of identifying significant themes using the NVivo data analysis software program allowed the researcher to have a deeper understanding of what general education teachers already know about teaching students with EBDs in the classroom, as well as what teachers needed to address weaknesses and

the deficits in academic progress for students with EBDs. The major themes have been discussed in a final report starting with the most observed themes.

The major themes are categorized by the research questions answered in the study based upon codes, then discussions, then themes. For example, responses were first coded by words or phrases that stood out as responses were being analyzed (Table 1). Words or phrases such as a) restorative, b) teacher relationships, c) preparation, etc., were listed as codes. Participant responses were further analyzed by how the code words aligned with the discussions that took place with each participant and their responses. Finally, the observed discussions that aligned with the code words were matched into major themes as they pertained to answering each research question. For example, the coded word restorative was matched with the discussions of a) restorative conversations, b) private conversations, c) book clubs, and d) creating a discipline course. These codes and discussions were then placed into the theme of “planned teaching strategies for EBD students.” The final report also addresses final thoughts, questions, limitations, and any future study suggestions.

Table 1*Codes to Themes for Data Analysis*

Codes	Discussed	Themes
Restorative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Restorative conversations - Private conversations - Participate in book clubs - Addresses cultural and behavioral topics - Created discipline course for teachers in my building - Teach to think before acting 	Perceptions of knowledge – promoting success
Teacher Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teacher/peer/student feedback - Reflection on successes for self and others - Different needs - Build trust - Know the student - Watch out for mental health - Stay after school to help students - Make sure needs are met - Teach to advocate - Build relationships all year - Space to feel comfortable - Be honest - Don't overreact - Teach self-awareness - Partner with student - Understand where student are coming from - Give student space -Respect student decisions 	Perceptions of knowledge – building relationships
Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Read FBAs, BIPs, and IEPs and create chart - Communication with staff, parents, and students - Plan for students with EBDs - Admit mistakes - Seating charts - Make sure behavior students and struggling students are not seated together. 	Perceptions of knowledge – Classroom preparation
Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Plan for potholes - Over stimulation - Consistency - Modeling - Positive language - Utilize co-teachers - Proximity - Ignore attention seeking behavior - Ask questions - Check on EBD students more frequently - Communication - Differentiation, reviewing expectations, practice social skills - Change things around - Pair students with peers - Move through different parts of the lesson quickly - Plan for student, not disability - Seating charts - Engaging activities - Give plenty of notice before any changes - Fidget spinners - Outlets like drawing or reading - Community building 	Perceptions of knowledge – Classroom Management

(table continues)

Codes	Discussed	Themes
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Staff members – para educators, co-teacher, special educators, counselors - Internet - Provide lots of culturally diverse stories - IEPs and FBAs to create lessons - Graphic organizers - UDL activities - Social and emotional lessons - Permanent records - Extensive home library - Parents - Professional development - Collegiate conversations - Professional journals - Educational blogs and podcasts - testing data to align instruction - Conduct own research - Past experiences 	Perceptions of knowledge – Classroom Preparation
Academic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reteach activities - Review academic goals - Scaffolding - Break lessons into chunks - Get out of seats - Redirect - Attention getters - Recovery - Alternative assignments - Extra credit - Acknowledge small improvements - UDL (Universal Design for Learning) - Extra time 	Perceptions of knowledge – Promoting Success
Behavioral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social Skills - Discuss appropriate and inappropriate behaviors of lesson - Re-choose good behavior - Structure but flexibility - Positive reinforcement - Self-esteem - Confidence - Address behaviors - Partner with student - Open lines of communication 	Perceptions of Knowledge – Promoting Success
Agitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Take step back - Cool-off time - Take walk - Walk and talk - Talk with student about problem - Remove student - Can put head down - Engaging activities - Reading and drawing as outlets - Talk student down - May need special education teacher - Administration - Hot passes - Chill place to go (safe space) - Remain calm - Use counselor - Clear room - Private discussions 	Addressing behavior in the general education setting – Behavioral Interventions

(table continues)

Codes	Discussed	Themes
Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mixing up activities - Differentiation - Attention getters - Chunk lessons - Send positive post cards home - Positive reinforcement - Plan to include - Gallery walks - Discuss expectations and outcomes - Scaffolding - Fair is not always equal - Growth mindset - Safe space to speak about issues - Opportunities to create - Rewards from BIPs - Redirect - Celebrate successes and successes of others - Feedback - Practice social skills - Celebrate diversity - Flexibility - Acknowledge small improvements - Goal setting - Alternative place to work - Relationship literature as subject matter - VIP program for Social and emotional skills - Positive peer community recognition - Positive phone calls - Self-esteem and confidence building - UDL 	Perceptions of knowledge – Promoting success
Choices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Choice in activities - Allow student feedback - Time to re-choose behavior - Encourage choice - Choice boards - Do-overs - re-do of assignments - remind student of choices 	Perceptions of Knowledge – student choice
Unsure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not had success with BIPs - Not really sure how to handle behavior plans - EBD students do not have success with presented materials - Not provided with adequate support - Takes more time to plan a lesson for EBD students - Sometimes separate lessons - Sometimes do not have answers - Different things on different days, cannot be planned - Have to figure out how to reach students - Don't have any resources, there is internet - EBD students behind - Removed from class - Testing data does not show potential - Environment not right - Too much time with administration 	Professional development needs for teaching students with EBDs
Time or Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Trial and error - Self-evaluating - Toolbox full of strategies 	Professional development needs for teaching EBD students
Peer Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pair with student who encourages - Buddy system - Build time for students to talk - Give students time to share with each other - Promote patience among peers - Peace circles - Boost confidence to gain respect among peers - Lunch groups - After school groups 	Addressing behavior in the general education classroom – Promoting Peer relationships

Trustworthiness

Qualitative research requires a great deal of data collection to create a narrative that is rich in information. Therefore, it is imperative for the investigation to follow procedures to ensure the study is trustworthy. There are several procedures in qualitative research that provide trustworthiness, which include prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and rich and thick data (Kellam & Cirell, 2018; Morse, 2015). For example, the more time a researcher spends establishing relationships with the participants essentially working as partners in the process the more information will be revealed (Morse, 2015; Roberts, 2020). This study involved participants taking part in an individual interview with the researcher by telephone, a video platform, or electronically due to COVID-19 restrictions. Participants who completed the interview electronically were further provided 14 days to review, respond, and return the interview electronically. Regardless of the way participants chose to respond to interview questions, it was important for the researcher to create positive relationships and a relaxing atmosphere with each participant to obtain the most in-depth information from the interview.

Creating a relaxing and reassuring atmosphere for participants yielded more information because participants shared more about their personal experiences. Sharing personal experiences with one another creates an opportunity for more information sharing by participants eliciting stronger responses (Morse, 2015; Roberts, 2020). It was very important to create this atmosphere for the participants through careful planning, preparation of materials, as well as providing meaningful conversation during electronic correspondences and telephone interviews.

This study is further trustworthy due interview questions being aligned with the research questions to obtain accurate information from participants (credibility), and allow for further research possibly from another study. The steps involved in completing this study can be done again to further explore middle school general education teachers' perceptions of teaching students with EBDs in the general education classroom (transferability). Furthermore, the final report provides explicit steps as to how my study was conducted (dependability), and a clear description of the findings both in narrative form and in tables creating a better understanding of the findings for future readers. Finally, conducting a document analysis of the professional development opportunities offered to middle school general education teachers allowed for triangulation of the responses from participants, creating confirmability of the study. Equally as important, each participant was sent a coded summary of his or her coded responses electronically to ensure responses were coded accurately based upon their responses to each interview question and for member checking.

Ethical Procedures

Measures for ethical protection of participants in this study was very important. Therefore, all participant information was confidential, and interview responses have remained anonymous. An explanation was given in detail to participants through a letter and invitation. Ross (2019) communicated that human subjects must be made completely aware of the safety risks and advantages of their participation with the study. More importantly, in order for a study to be ethical participants must be notified within that explanation that they can withdraw from the study at any time without tension from the

researcher (Ross, 2019). Therefore, it was also explained that all interviewees could withdraw at any time. Furthermore, all participant information will be kept in a locked file cabinet for five years and then destroyed. The file cabinet is kept in the office of the researcher's home, eliminating any educational staff from stumbling upon participant information. An explanation of all procedures and precautions were addressed in the letter to participants.

Summary

Leaders from a school district have communicated concerns regarding academic progress for students with EBDs in the general education classroom when compared to their non-disabled peers, as a result of the knowledge general education teachers' lack in utilizing academic and behavioral strategies when teaching students with EBDs. The research study identified a group of middle school general education teachers to participate in an interview to establish what those teachers know about teaching students with EBDs in the general education classroom. A qualitative, case study design has been chosen to gather and reflect data as a result of the identified problem being a social and educational matter. Furthermore, data collection is thorough as a result of the wealth of knowledge produced from a case study design. Participants revealed information in an individualized setting most comfortable to each participant.

By creating a more personal environment for participants, the researcher became more of an observer instead of a participant in the study. Choosing to be an observer in the study eliminated any biases the researcher may have about knowledge discussed by general education teachers, as a result of the researcher having a special education

classroom with students with EBDs. Selecting participants was a purposeful process determined upon the responses in email permitting participation in the study. The target number of participants was 10 to 15 interviewees (11 participants responded) to ensure accurate data collection. The drafted letter to participants provided clarification of confidentiality as well as the steps being taken to ensure confidentiality. The letter asked teachers for permission to participate in the study. An invitation to participate in the interview was also included for the purpose of choosing the interview completion method with dates and times. If participants choose to complete interview questions through email, 14 days was provided to complete and return the interview questions through email. All data was and will continue to be secured in a locked file cabinet, as well as teachers having names removed and assigned numbers to ensure confidentiality of participants. Finally, collected data was analyzed using the NVivo program. I coded participant responses using coded words that moved into discussions. The coded words and discussions were then placed into major themes of perceptions' of knowledge participants felt they had for teaching students with EBDs in the general education classroom.

Chapter 4: Results

This basic qualitative study explored middle school general education teachers' perceptions of their knowledge for teaching students with EBDs in their general education classrooms. Only 46% of students with EBDs spend 80% or more of the school day in the general education classroom compared to 62.6% of students falling under all other disabilities (Freeman et al., 2019; U.S. Department of Education & Civil Rights Rights, 2016). Furthermore, reading and language deficits have been shown to be at least two grade levels below their peers without disabilities (Garwood & Vernon-Feagans, et al., 2017). Additionally, the special education supervisor at the study site reported that students with EBDs are spending a great deal of time receiving instruction in alternative settings outside of the general education classroom due to the number of classroom disruptions they cause (Houghlin, personal communication, April 23, 2017). Therefore, there is a problem with academic and behavioral achievement in the general education classroom for students with EBDs when compared to their peers without disabilities.

Understanding middle school general education teacher perceptions of their knowledge of teaching students with EBDs may be an important component for understanding how to develop additional training for these general education teachers in academic and behavioral strategies for students with EBDs. Teachers of students with EBDs struggle to make decisions regarding the academic and behavioral areas to address from the start to increase student success due to not understanding the behaviors displayed by students with EBD (Ennis, 2015; Young, 2019). It is common for teachers to be reactive and not proactive when addressing discipline issues for students with EBDs

(Patton, 2018; Ross & Sliger, 2015). However, due to teachers utilizing ineffective academic and behavioral strategies for teaching students with EBDs, these students fail the most on competency exams as well as performing below grade level in important content areas such as mathematics (Peltier & Vannest, 2016).

Data Collection

A brief introduction of this study and a letter requesting permission to contact general education teachers was sent to three different middle school principals electronically within the school district. The letter was reviewed and approved by the institutional review board beforehand and followed all requirements to ensure confidentiality and the least amount of harm to participants. Once permission was granted from each principal, a letter requesting permission to participate in the study with a detailed explanation and an invitation to participate in the interview was sent to 105 middle school teachers electronically. Of the 105 teachers, 12 teachers responded stating that they would participate in the study and the interview. However, one participant dropped out of the study as a result of not having the time to complete the interview. Therefore, there were a total of 11 participants who agreed to participate in this study.

Participants were provided with the three choices for answering the interview questions due to the COVID-19 pandemic and adhering to CDC guidelines. Participants were allowed to respond to the interview questions by phone, electronically, or video conferencing. One participant completed the interview by phone. Three participants completed the interview by video conferencing. Seven participants completed the interview through email. All telephone conferencing interviews were recorded with

permission from each participant for the purpose of thorough data analysis. Participants who completed the interview by email were provided 14 days to review, respond, and return the interview electronically.

Data Analysis

Data collected from participant interviews were analyzed and coded into major themes using the NVivo program. There were a variety of themes that addressed general education teachers' perceptions of the knowledge they had for teaching students with EBDs (Research Question 1). Participants discussed their perceptions of teaching students with EBDs in their classrooms based on their personal experiences and encounters with these students. Participants also discussed academic and behavioral strategies planned when students with EBDs entered their general education classrooms. The major themes found after analyzing participants responses answering Research Question 1 were (a) planned strategies for students with EBDs, (b) building relationships with students with EBDs, (c) promoting success in the general education classroom for students with EBDs, (d) teacher preparation and classroom management, and finally (e) student choice for students with EBDs.

Addressing students with EBDs behaviors in the general education classroom (Research Question 2) was also led to themes in which participants discussed the strategies utilized when students with EBDs begin to behave in an inappropriate manner. Participants further discussed strategies implemented to minimize inappropriate behavior. The major themes were (a) addressing growing agitation for students with EBDs and (b) promoting peer relationships for students with EBDs.

Finally, additional beneficial training that may be needed for teaching students with EBDs successfully (Research Question 3) was answered in one theme. This theme solely addressed professional development needs for teaching students with EBDs. Participants discussed the skills or resources they believed they were lacking. However, it was never discussed what additional trainings they believed would be needed to successfully teach students with EBDs in their classrooms. Interview responses from multiple participants illustrated that they realized additional professional development was needed, but what exactly was not known.

Each participant was sent a coded summary of his or her responses electronically to ensure responses were coded accurately into major themes based on their responses to each interview question and for member checking. Every participant responded electronically in concurrence to how responses were coded into major themes.

A document analysis was also conducted to determine professional development opportunities offered to general education teachers during the 2019–2020 school year by the school district promoting successful academic and behavioral strategies for teaching students with EBDs in the general education classroom. The school board within the school district had to be contacted to obtain this information, as it had been removed from the website. The appropriate personnel were contacted electronically to obtain the dates and times of the only professional development offered district wide to all general education teachers from the school district. This professional development was called “Conscious Discipline” and will be explored later in the Results section.

Results

This qualitative case study was based on the following guiding research questions and are answered in detail based on coded data analysis:

Research Question 1: What perceptions do middle school general education teachers have about teaching students with EBDs in the classroom?

Research Question 2: How are behaviors of students with EBDs addressed in the general education setting during instructional time?

Research Question 3: What additional trainings to teach students with EBDs would be beneficial for creating a positive learning environment?

Research Question 1: General Education Teacher Perceptions of Knowledge for Teaching EBD Students

Strategies Planned for Teaching EBD Students

This research question was answered in a number of the interview questions, and responses were placed into five different themes (a) strategies planned for teaching students with EBDs, (b) building relationships with students with EBDs, (c) promoting success in the general education classroom, (d) teacher preparation and classroom management, and (e) student choice for students with EBDs. The first theme found after analyzing the data was strategies planned for teaching students with EBDs. Participant responses often overlapped into many of the asked interview questions. Based on the responses (Table 2), teachers' perceptions of teaching students with EBDs in the general education classroom were very mixed. Teacher responses ranged from feeling as if they always had to plan lessons to not overstimulate students with EBDs to believing that their

lessons promoted positive growth because of the strategies they utilized in the classroom for teaching students with EBDs in the general education classroom. Nonetheless, some participants believed that each day was different, and likewise, each student with EBDs was different. Therefore, a strategy may work one day but not on the next day. Other participants expressed feelings of uncertainty as a result of the information they would receive at the beginning of the year not being sufficient. One participant explicitly stated, “I am only as good as the information that is provided to me at the beginning of the year.” Another participant stated that being a social studies teacher, she was only “provided with a paraprofessional” when students with EBDs were placed in her classroom, and that paraprofessionals could not modify assignments.

Several participants also expressed that the content area being taught had a lot to do with how and when the general education teacher would have to address behaviors from a student or students with EBDs in their classrooms. Specifically, reading was mentioned by two participants as a result of these teachers believing that most students with EBDs read below grade level. It was also mentioned that general education teachers only had input in the progress or updating of behavior goals, and most of the time the goals were made more strenuous for the student with EBDs.

Lastly, one participant felt that putting students with EBDs in the classroom was a big concern. Therefore, lessons had to be planned using best practices, but there was not an explanation for what was considered to be best practices. Another participant believed that a general education teacher must be “on his/her game” when teaching students with EBDs in the general education setting.

Despite some participants expressing uncertainty about teaching students with EBDs in the general education classroom, several participants shared positive perceptions. It was expressed that when students with EBDs felt as if they could be successful learners in the classroom, positive learning did take place. For example, one participant discussed perceptions of creating positive community environments within the classroom as being a success for students with EBDs. Another perception conveyed was that being a facilitator rather than an authority figure contributed to positive learning for students with EBDs. Finally, the perception of being available to talk to students with EBDs when it is needed and treating them the same as all of the other students was communicated as being positive tools to utilize for these students in the classroom.

Table 2*Strategies Planned for Teaching Students with EBDs*

Participant	Response
1	The thought is in the back of my head of not overstimulating students while planning out my daily lessons. Planning for “potholes” or predicting where behaviors could intensify comes into play for me every day. It is difficult, because every student is so different. I believe being consistent in my expectations and verbiage is extremely important when trying to build academic stamina. We can model what the stamina looks like, and cheer students on when they’re engaged in an activity.
2	I would like to say that I have it totally figured out, but that is far from the truth. I give it my best, but I am human and I make mistakes. When that happens in class, I apologize to the student in front of the class admitting my error. I am only as good as the information I am provided at the beginning of the year. I am constantly making adjustments to how I teach because the playing field in the classroom isn’t level by any means. Some children have no support at home. When they begin to believe that they can be successful, their behaviors settle and their attitude towards learning become positive. When this begins to happen, they often show reductions of their behavioral outbursts in not only my class but others as well.
3	Teachers must be able to read warning signs. Hope student can use self-advocating skills. I talk to students about what I may have done wrong to cause the situation to escalate. For example did I miss a cue?
4	By sixth grade, behavioral and academic instructional outcomes have been developed; when I have input it is usually to update them based on my knowledge of the student and his or her work, and behavior. Most of the time, the update involves making the goals for strenuous and challenging, since elementary schools focus more on basic reading skills than on literary analysis and interpretation, and many times, basic writing skills haven’t been taught at all. Students with EBDs often have difficulty with subject matter, especially English/Language Arts. I find out what their reading levels are and recommend books that will challenge them appropriately, but not so much as to cause stress. They often view me as the facilitator rather than the authority figure, and they know I will help even to the point of dictation while they tell their story. Once a student understands that he or she can do the work and that it isn’t impossibly hard, that people will want to hear what they say, and their opinions are valuable positive behavior growth is possible.
7	Students with EBDs are a big concern. When I plan for students with EBDs all students benefit because I utilize best practices. I Plan my lessons to assume that I will have students with EBDs in my class. I try to keep in mind when planning for these needs to be met for students with EBDs. I plan for the student not the disability. For example, “I am a student with EBD but that is not who I am.”
8	Outbursts, students sleeping in class, when students get off task or seeking attention creates off track it is a disruption. I try to create learning community lessons, icebreaker games so that students can communicate with one another, and create a community environment. The IEP is just a piece of paper until you meet the student.
11	I teach in an area where students come from a wide variety of socio-economic status. Some students come in talking about the new iPhone they just got, while others are worried about where their next meal is coming from. I would say the greater majority come from the latter. Knowing this, I try to build in about 10 to 15 minutes within a 90 minute learning block to connect with students. I am giving them the opportunity to share what is going on in their worlds so that they can focus on content, and I feel the result is a higher quality of active instruction.
12	I believe that my instruction leads to positive growth because my students know that I am not babysitting them or treating them like many other teachers have. I had a student reach out to me at the end of this past school year (a student how gets written up almost weekly for behavioral/emotional outbursts). The student sent me an email thanking me for not treating him any differently, and for showing him breathing exercises to help calm down when he gets angry. I am not here to punish students or to put them on the spot. I am patient but also very blunt about what I expect or am looking for from them in terms of work and effort. I believe my students work harder in my class than others, because they know and can see that I respect their decisions/needs/desires for learning. During instruction I always feel as though I need to be “on my game.” Students can ask questions that pop into their heads, and might be having a rough day. I need to be aware of these things. When these students see that I’ve listened to their requests and created a lesson plan based on what they prefer, they put much more effort in. As an educator, I feel it is my job not only to teach but also to watch out for my students’ mental health. Middle school is such a formative and/or difficult time for so many students. I don’t ever want to contribute to a student feeling depressed, angry, or lost. I only want to help the student(s) reach their full potential, and I believe understanding and watching out for their mental health is part of it.

Building Relationships with Students with EBDs

The second theme, building relationships with students with EBDs, was discovered when participant responses were further analyzed and also answered Research Question 1 (see Table 3). Many participants stated that they believed building a positive relationship with a student with an EBD determined how the school year would go for all students in the general education classroom. The participants also attributed creating positive relationships with students with EBDs as important to successful learning in the general education classroom. One participant stated that there was a “disconnect with middle school teachers building positive relationships with students in middle school due to focusing more on teaching content.” Nonetheless, the general consensus from the majority of the participants was that in order for a student with EBD to be successful in the general education classroom, a positive relationship must be built between the teacher and the student with EBD. Furthermore, this relationship must be maintained for the entire school year.

Table 3*Building Relationships with Students with EBDs*

Participant	Response
1	It comes down to the relationship with the student and understanding where the student might be triggered. Building trust with the student is imperative from day one, so that student feels valued and not attacked by me when I am trying to diffuse any type of situation.
3	Have to get to know the kid or kids from the beginning in order for positive growth. It really comes down to building relationships. Trust is very important. I don't feel middle school teachers are experts in building relationships. They know the content, because content is pushed. Therefore, teachers do not take the time to build relationships. There is a disconnect in building relationships with students in middle school. Myself and the student can talk about and resolve an issue when relationships are built.
4	I prefer not to send them out with another adult, because it is my relationship with that student that's on the line. The other adult most likely will not have a clue about the problem.
8	Relationship building with students with EBDs and keep building all year. Again relationship building. We get IEPs at the beginning of the year, but it's better to wait to meet the student and then go back to the IEP to match instruction. The IEP is just a piece of paper until you get to know the student.
9	It is a matter of getting to know the student, and it varies from child to child. I think all planning starts with knowing who your students are. The impact depends on their needs and changes daily. I work to build trusting relationships with students so that they feel comfortable and confident to try something new. I get to know students at the beginning of the year. I also bring in items of interest to the class. I want each student to feel seen and known.
10	Students with EBDs need different things on different days, and they often cannot be planned in advance.
11	Making connections with students are a primary for me. Understanding the dynamics of where they come from and who they are often makes the uphill battle much less steep. Additionally, being respectful of students who may be coming in with "extra baggage" and giving them the grace that they need. If you give them the space they will come around to learning.
12	I can typically tell as soon as a student walks into my room, what their attitude will be like or if something is wrong. I do my absolute best to get to know each of my students and to use that to my advantage when trying to get assignments completed.

Promote Success in General Education Classroom for Students with EBDs

The third identifiable theme that answered Research Question 1 was promoting success in general education for students with EBDs (see Table 4). Participants mentioned a wide variety of strategies that they implemented to guide students with EBDs to successful learning. Several teachers discussed the use of restorative practice and restorative justice as a means of teaching students with EBDs successfully in their classrooms. One participant also stated that she held trainings for restorative practice and restorative justice for teachers in her building and another school building that were both title one schools. Restorative practice and justice require students to have restorative

conversations when a behavior is displayed using circles, conferences, and peer mediation, and include both affective statements and questions (Katic et al., 2020)

Several participant responses mentioned allowing students with EBDs to stay after school and receive assistance in a smaller, more personal setting, as well as keeping students with EBDs moving during instruction as effective strategies for academic and behavioral success in their classrooms. Nonetheless, the majority of participant responses entailed academic and behavioral strategies such as teacher, peer, and self-feedback, differentiation, proximity, chunking of assignments, positive feedback, teaching social skills lessons, keeping with the IEP, using instruments to help maintain focus or re-direct the student, seat assignments, and other outlets to help calm students with EBDs in the general education setting. Participant six communicated that she is a “firm believer in Mind Set Growth,” and that the main idea of “Mind Set Growth is that if you practicing and keep trying, you can improve skills.” Nonetheless, specific examples of how some of these strategies were utilized in the classroom were not discussed. For example, several participants mentioned differentiation, but did not explain what differentiation looked like in their classrooms. For instance, participant one stated “differentiating lessons tailored to students’ needs and personalities allows for them to be able to feel more successful.”

Table 4*Promote Success in General Education Classroom for Students with EBDs*

Participant	Response
1	I am always in favor of having restorative practices with the student away from the rest of the class, so as not to cause a scene and to keep our academic train chugging on the tracks. Teacher, peer, and self-feedback allow students to reflect on their success and their successes of others. I promote the fact that we all have different needs and that we must trust one another, and that I can provide the appropriate tools for their educational needs. There is great time and effort placed in the area of differentiation. By mixing up types of activities students are complete, students with those needs will be more engaged. Differentiating lessons tailored to students' needs and personalities allows for them to be able to feel more successful. Finding ways to celebrate successes is important in my classroom. By having numerous checkpoints in lessons to provide students with feedback, they will build upon successes. I not only teach Social Studies content, but I am also teaching prosocial skills. Not having do we review the academic goals of the lesson, but we review, and at times, practice the social skills of the lesson. For example, we will discuss the behavior expectations when completing an activity. We will then take a small chunk of time to practice those behaviors. We will then debrief discussing successes and failures of the class academically and behaviorally. My classroom management style makes it very clear that we succeed and fail together as a class, and that fair is not always equal.
2	I am the partner with these students when doing small group work in class to avoid any issues. I use positive reinforcement, close proximity, sit with them and offer suggestions, ask questions to make them think about possible different answers that they could come up with, use praise when a student is right, and I will only call on those students when and only when they can explain why their answers are correct.
3	I always try to make sure I see the students during the day to see types of moods they are in. I always try to keep grouping in mind so students are successful. I make sure they get along. I really try to keep with the IEP accommodations. I get those students up and moving, build community, use engaging videos, create escape rooms where students have to find clues to get to the answers, and I use lots of games like Jenga to learn and review concepts. I consider seat assignments, fidget spinners, outlets like drawing, or reading because some students like to read. If the student makes it to the point of agreed work completion, then he/she can read. However, I specify that work must be quality work.
4	I write a response to their interpretation (writing assignment) and either agree with it and explain why, or nudge them to think about it in a different way. Some students have stayed after school with me when they are not able to complete their work during class, which also allows for more personal relationship with the student. When we work on writing, I adjust the level of demand for writing sophistication and developmental needs and ability of the child. I teach these students that each completed writing is a creation that did not exist before; each journal entry of a book that read is one student's interpretation of the meaning of the book, and why it is important or valuable. Periodically throughout the year, I give students a variety of topics to write about, like draw a monster and then describe the monster to another student in another school in writing. We also do "PopUp Debates," where I give them a topic to form an opinion about, such as the value of school uniforms, and students "pop up" and give their opinions. Listening and speaking are the two standards addressed here and are crucial to developing interpersonal skills. I recommend books to them that reflect their cultures and backgrounds as much as I can, and their writings directly reflect their culture and backgrounds as much as possible. Writing assignments are completed within a week's period of time. If nothing gets done on a particular day because of a problem, the world does not come to an end.
6	I plan how to include them without making it known. I pick easier questions for these students. I do not put those kids on the spot. I also have students help me if they just cannot control themselves to complete work. I try hard to include them. If they raise their hands I will call on them. Try to be positive. For example, if the answer is not right I will say "I like how you go that answer, but does someone else have a different answer?" If the student is having a rough day I will pull the student to discuss to try and help make learning better. I try to help them understand that in order to learn mistakes have to be made. Making mistakes is not bad. I am a firm believer in "Growth Mindset." Growth Mindset involves 6 mindsets, but the main idea is that if you keep practicing and keep trying, you can improve skills. For example, math and following all of the steps to solve a problem. Mistakes how you learn.

(table continues)

Participant	Response
7	I provide opportunities to create. I use checklists with rewards and the behavior management plans.
8	<p>Try to individualize instruction. I also have working lunches where students can have a quiet place to work. I teach a 90 minute block, but I break the block into three chunks and one chunk gets them out of their seats. We do an all classroom break. We do social/emotional learning within instruction. I truly send the message that everyone can pass this class with a "C" or better by allowing: work redo, recovery work, work with a child to assist in completion (one to one instruction), alternative assignments, extra credit, extra time, provide positive feedback, send postcards home and positive phone calls home, and I implement Secret Santa for my students with EBDs that have trouble creating positive relationships with their peers. We set goals every quarter – Where have we been? Where are we now? Where do we see ourselves in the next quarter? We talk about realistic goals and how to get there. WE talk about short term and long term goals.</p> <p>I teach kids to reflect. Acknowledge small improvements and positive reinforcement. I try not to dwell on the negative. I will do quiet whispers giving positive reinforcement and complements when making good choices. I provide rewards for good behavior. I allow working lunch, and I cut down on work load. Really it is looking at the child as an individual. I still have whole class expectations, but keep individual in mind. I have student meet with counselor and will utilize a mediator if needed.</p>
9	<p>With students with behavior plans in their IEPs, my responses and strategies are responsive to those needs as well. For students with EBDs, I focus on the positive growth.</p> <p>I try to focus on thematic connections and recall explicitly on what we have done before so that we can build on it. We also look at the assessment data throughout the year to celebrate growth. We talk about learning and mistakes as evidence of learning so we can reframe them as something positive. I treat each day as a new day, and even within the same class period I regard what has happened as something in the past to learn from and move on.</p> <p>I check in with students with EBDs individually rather than call on them in front of the class. If I do intend to call on them to draw into discussion, I will give them a heads up and give them a chance to work through a response ahead of time. No matter the effort, I recognize their willingness to try. With each assignment, I let them know which parts are the most important so they can focus on those pieces and not be overwhelmed by the entire assignment. I utilize the UDL (Universal Design for Learning) process in planning for each student's individual needs when choosing which scaffolds and accommodations students require in order to achieve that mastery.</p>
10	Students come to me from a wide range of developmental, behavioral, and emotional needs. Their needs are considered by providing reading material that reflects or mirrors their personal situations. I use positive reinforcement, chunking of lessons to promote positive self-esteem.
11	<p>I place a big focus on meeting students where they are and celebrating their successes. We talk a lot about mindset. Many students like to say "I can't." I make it a point to emphasize that they can always try. This leads to students being able to attempt new concepts, and when they begin to master a concept I will have them instruct a peer to help build confidence. I try to keep students with EBDs engaged in lessons by keeping them as interactive as possible like, moving around the room, working with partners, sometimes in groups. If a student feels he/she needs to be in a more private place those accommodations are made. Staying flexible and agile are key to the success of students.</p> <p>Often times my first response is a redirection of behaviors, reminding them that the goal is to be working on the assignment. I also might try to remove the stimulus from what is causing the behavior.</p>
12	I want students with EBDs to feel included, so that they feel they are just as capable as their peers. This brings students self-confidence up and reassures they can achieve just as much as their peers. I tend to be more patient with students with EBDs and their issues. I let my students know that my room is a safe place to speak about issues and topics that may be difficult to talk about in another classroom. I'm honest with my students and give them ownership of their learning both inside and outside the classroom. If there is something specific in a student's IEP, FBA, or BIP, I will differentiate instruction for my classroom while still leading to the same end result. That way, the students(s) can still contribute in a classroom discussion, etc., and still feel valued and confident in themselves.

Teacher Preparation and Classroom Management

The fourth identified theme from participant responses was teacher preparation and classroom management (Table 5), and also answer research question one. Participant responses ranged from utilizing special education teachers, other professionals in the building, co-teachers, behavioral analysts, counselors, and even paraprofessionals as resources to help them plan for the education of students with EBDs in their classrooms. It was stated that “keeping an open dialogue with other professionals in the building was imperative for students with EBDs to be successful in the general education classroom.” Several participant responses mentioned that general education teachers must keep up with accommodations in IEPs, FBAs, and BIPs for students with EBDs to experience success when being taught general education. Other responses included the modeling of proper behaviors, constantly changing the classroom around, pairing a student with EBD with a student with a non-disabled peer, being aware of extra time and graphic organizers, attending professional developments, having counselors come in to teach social skills lessons, accessing family members for assistance, and planning multiple lessons as plans of action to promote success for students with EBDs in their classrooms. However, it was consistently stated by more than one participant that using professionals and co-workers within the building, family members, and even other peers as valuable resources for successful teaching and classroom management in the classroom for students with EBDs. For instance participant one stated that “case managers, behavioral analysts, and paraprofessionals can provide insight on what might be going on in the

student’s life or where there are some breakdowns that may be occurring in academic engagement.”

Table 5

Teacher Preparation/Classroom Management

Participant	Response
1	I learned during my 1 st year of teaching to attack the FBAs, IEPs, etc., by reading them to the best of my ability prior to the beginning of the school year. After reading them, I complete a chart of needs and accommodations of the students I have. I reference that chart almost every day to make sure that I am meeting the needs of my students. I also share and communicate that chart to any paraprofessionals or co-teachers who may be working in the classroom with me as well. Additionally, I communicating with our special services staff at school about any student concerns is paramount to the successful education of all of my students. I believe open dialogue with my colleagues is the number one place to go. Discussing with my team members any strategies that are working and not working for specific students is important. Discussing students concerns with special services staff is also imperative. Case managers, behavioral analysts, and paraprofessionals can provide some insight on what might be going on the student’s life or where there are some breakdowns that may be occurring in academic engagement. I am currently in a Master’s program for Educational Leadership. These types of discussions happen weekly, vary by topic, and have really expanded my knowledge and scope of students’ needs. Planning for “potholes” or predicting where behaviors could intensify come into play for me every day. The thought in is in the back of my head of not overstimulating professional development needs
2	When I plan for my classes that have behavioral needs in them, I am very careful when creating a seating chart to help make the students feel comfortable and supported. I purposely do not seat behavioral students and struggling emotional students near one another because they tend to set each other off. I meet with the parents prior to the school year speaking with parents to learn about their child’s strengths and weaknesses, what sets them off, and what calms them down. A piece of paper just isn’t enough. I make notes. I attend professional developments, use ED talks, and collegial conversations.
3	I always try to be aware of extra time, organizers, and keeping with IEPs. I try to make sure I see students during the day to see types of moods they are in. I always keep grouping in mind so students are successful. I make sure they get along. I really try to keep with the IEP accommodations, and I ask questions about the IEP. I try to make sure I am following the IEP, by using team members associated with students. Utilizing your team is very important to make sure lessons are appropriate. Parents and even other peers are also important for utilizing. I did some professional development with grade level groups with role plays using strategies to help students with EBDs.
4	When I find that I have a student with a behavioral or emotional disorder, I check their permanent record for insights about them from their previous teachers. My students writing give me a ton of information about their lives, their dreams, and their concerns. Their writings help me build the empathy I need to be the best teacher I can be for each of them, and that includes having high expectations for them, whatever their challenges, and hold their hands for every step. Each Friday, we have a “sharing day,” and students share the writing they have completed during that week or a previous week, while the class listens and responds. At the end of the year, they take home a “book” of the best writings completed by the students in all three of the classes I teach. Sometimes, just being away from other students, but still in the classroom helps a student “destress.” Adjusting assignments also helps, as well as working one-on-one with me.
6	I change things around – whole group lectures, individual, or group work. I make sure to pair these students with a peer or co-teacher is available to help. I make sure to move into different parts of the lesson quickly. Use my co-workers as resources if they’re successful. I use special education teachers and internet of needed for resources. It is trial and error. If what I try does not work then special education teacher will remove the student and take that student for a walk or a break. If student refuses to leave then have to call administration.

(table continues)

Participant	Response
7	<p>I provide a lot of stories for students to read from diverse backgrounds and cultures. I ask for data to be provided for students with EBDs so I can choose stories for students to read addressing emotional struggles. I use FBA and IEP data to create lessons supporting positive emotional behavior. I also use testing at the beginning of the year to line up instructional learning. I print out materials and resources for students with EBDs. I conduct my own research. There are a lot of resources out there.</p> <p>I use past experiences, counselors, parents, and other teachers as resources. I do not overact. I try to know the warning signs, because I know the student.</p> <p>Teach students self-awareness. Maybe use hand signals when becoming escalated. Teach the student to use those signs and signals.</p>
9	<p>I give plenty of notice regarding upcoming changes, and just really work to keep the lines of communication open.</p>
10	<p>Students with emotional disorders are given alternative assignments if needed, as well as extra time and reduced distractions. I use weekly social or emotional lessons in my lessons, as well as understanding and empathy. Behavioral and emotional support is also utilized by having grade level counselors come in and complete mini lessons throughout the school year as the needs arises with the students. All instruction is individualized to ensure that FBAs and IEPs are met. This is often accomplished with a team of people involved. The special education team, administration, family, students, and school counselors are resources.</p>
11	<p>My lessons focus heavily on modeling respectful behavior to all students, and as such the expectation that this respect will be reciprocated to me. This behavior is often translated to their peers and in other classroom settings. This often takes students off the defensive so more energy or effort is focused on the lessons. I work very closely with students' case managers to best adhere to students' needs and goals while still meeting academic milestones. Additionally, I use differentiation and different teaching platforms to encourage student participation. Working with case managers is very important, as well as family members to get all team members on board for the good of the student.</p> <p>Almost always, students will be given time for re-teaching and recovery when a specific assignment goes poorly.</p>
12	<p>I typically check-in on students with emotional or behavioral issues a bit more frequently to keep them on task or to answer any questions that they may have. I do my best to have additional lesson plans and materials available in case something goes wrong. If it is a method of instruction that is not working for the student, then often times another environment is the first thing I have to try. For example, another classroom, working with a mentor or case manager, etc. If I think the student is having a tremendously rough day and I can tell they have checked out, I will call the school counselor and let them speak with that person for a while. Typically, when I have one or more student with EBD issues, I will have a teacher's aide in the classroom with me. If the lesson is unsuccessful, the aide will sit down with the student(s) and work with them slowly.</p>

Student Choice for Students with EBDs

The final associated theme, student choice for students with EBDs answering research question one established from participant responses mentioned providing choices to students with EBD for creating success in the general education classroom (Table 6). Participants suggested that they use a variety of strategies to reach students with EBDs, as well as all other students in the classroom with students with EBDs. Participants one, three, four, seven, nine, ten, and twelve all specified that they provide

students with EBDs a choice when it comes to the instructional activities they complete. It was expressed that by allowing students in the classroom a choice in activities allows the possibility to think more freely, as well as celebrates diversity. One participant stated that “allowing students to choose how they will complete an activity, they will do better and learn more.” This participant mentioned that students with EBDs were allowed to create projects using Anime characters. There was mention of choice boards, reading a variety of stories involving social skills for class discussions, creating poster boards, PowerPoints, choices in reading and writing material, and how a lesson would be taught. For example, participant one stated “by allowing students to have a choice in activities, it lets them think more freely, encourages choice, and celebrates diversity. Participant 12 communicated “I will ask the class how they want to learn the material – PowerPoint with lecture, video, group work, gallery walk, etc. – and when they see that I’ve listened to their request and created a lesson based on what they prefer, they put much more effort in.” However, this participant did not disclose what a gallery walk entailed, but stated that when students see that he has listened to the class requests they put much more effort into completing the assigned work.

Table 6*Student Choice for Students with EBDs*

Participant	Response
1	Scaffolding in my classroom reaches out to every student. By allowing students to have a choice in activities, it lets them think more freely, encourages choice, and celebrates diversity. I let the students provide feedback too on what is helpful for them and it provides great insight.
3	I do a lot of choice activities and a lot of self-selection. I teach English. When it comes to projects, I try to make sure students have a choice. They can pick the type of project with same information. For example, drawings, poster boards, PowerPoints, art, Anime, etc. If you let the student choose something different they learn more and do better. I provide a mixture of choice. I might have to acknowledge that today might not be the day to learn. It might be the day for emotional needs to be met. In English, there is a lot of discussion. Kids with EBDs need social skills. A lot of the stories in English involve social issues and confrontations, as well as how to deal with situations. There is room for a lot of discussions and a lot of choice.
4	My program allows students to make choices in reading and writing material, so they have ownership of the work. This helps them to develop a sense of their own efficacy in completing difficult tasks, and build self-esteem.
7	I provide the opportunity for choice boards, do-overs, and redoing assignments, but make them take responsibility for having to redo the assignment.
9	I offer choice within reasonable parameters (with workload, assessment formats, etc.) while keeping the overall structure and routine of the classroom as predictable as possible.
10	I provide the students with choices in activities to complete.
12	I will ask the class how they want to learn the material – PowerPoint with lecture, video, group work, gallery walk, etc. – and when they see that I've listened to their request and created a lesson based on what they prefer, they put much more effort in.

Research Question 2: Addressing Students with EBDs Behavior in the General**Education Classroom***Addressing Growing Agitation for Students with EBDs*

Research question two was answered from interview questions pertaining to the strategies utilized when students with EBDs are beginning to behave in an inappropriate manner or the behaviors have escalated to the point of classroom disruption. Strategies were also mentioned to minimize inappropriate behaviors for students with EBDs. There were two recognizable themes a) addressing growing agitation for students with EBDs, and b) promoting peer relationships for students with EBDs.

In the first theme, addressing growing agitation for students with EBDs (Table 7) a variety of strategies participants implemented were discussed when students with EBDs began to become agitated or the behaviors escalated. There were a variety of responses from participants regarding how to address growing agitation from a student with EBDs. The most commonly stated responses from participants involved talking to the student calmly or talking the student down so as not to further agitate the student, and having a private conference with the student, as well as having the student take a break, go for a walk to cool off, talking with an adult he or she feels most comfortable discussing issues with, or utilizing other distractors such as music, drawing, a quiet place in the room, and code words to express agitation so that student may leave the room. Several participants indicated that if the strategies they have tried to utilize do not seem to be effective, then administration has to be called to remove the student from the room. Nevertheless, a few participants stated that they try to teach students with EBDs coping strategies using “I statements” to talk about how a situation or another person made he or she feel, and when a situation arises how to make a better decision for the purpose of changing the outcome of the situation. For example, participant seven stated “If it is a really negative behavior, I will have the student removed. I also try to reason with the student. For example, I will have the student use “I statements,” “feel statements,” or have the student draw a picture of how he/she feels.”

Table 7*Addressing Growing Agitation for Students with EBDs*

Participant	Response
1	My initial reactions are always in an effort to diffuse the situation, and not to take away from the engagement of the rest of the class. Especially, with my students with emotional and behavior disorders. I attempt to take a step back and not become emotional. Generally, I give the students time to re-choose a better behavior in the situation, while providing those students with feedback on what makes a good choice and a bad choice. If extra time is needed to “cool off” then so be it. If the student most definitely needs time to cool off, sometimes taking a walk on his/her own helps. Sometimes, taking a walk and talk with myself, a paraprofessional, co-teacher, or other staff member can help. Sometimes, asking to “push in” and speak with the student about the problem, or nothing related at all, can help to diffuse the situation.
2	When dealing with students with emotional needs, sometimes you just have to stop instruction and address whatever situation the students are dealing with at that time. A break from the stimuli that is causing the behavior could be a walk, running an errand, listening to music, change of seat, a side discussion with the student. Most of the time the behavior is for seeking attention, so my first reaction is to give the behavior no attention. If a problem escalates, then I have a one on one private discussion about the impact their behavior is having on their education, me (personally), and then the class. I find myself explaining how their behavior impacts the view that their other classmates have of them.
3	I will have a student use code words or key words when becoming escalated and need to leave. I will also use a walking break – earn a pass and can take laps around the building to use when needed. I found that I have to stage opportunities for those students to earn a pass. The teacher has to be on the ball for the student to learn. Providing verbal cues to take the break is also good. Like, “I see you need to go to the bathroom, or can you take this to the library?” May provide an alternative place to work, or redirect or remove the student.
4	If a student gets into a fight with another student, I move the other student away and call for administrative support. If there is a verbal altercation, I tell the students to table it until we can address the situation without an audience. If they don’t listen, and continue to argue or verbally abuse each other, I will call for safety and security to take the students to another location so that the issue can be resolved by the behavioral specialist and the rest of the students aren’t impacted by their disruption. If it’s a small interruption, I take the student into “my office” (right outside my door), and ask them what I can do to help. If it’s a small problem, I do will walk over to their desks and what they need for me to do to help them get back to work. I also tell them if they can’t work that day, for whatever reason, they are allowed to put their head down on their desk and relax for a bit until they feel better. Sometimes a bad day is just a bad day, and all you can hope for is that you don’t ruin an important relationship because of it. I also use my best calming voice (and I have a good one since I don’t yell), and move closer to the student (unless I know from their records or personal experience that moving close to him/her will agitate further). If they need to step out of the room with me, I let my co-teacher know (if I have one), that I will be taking the student out to talk to them, he/she should monitor the class or continue teaching while I am gone. Again, I tell them they are allowed to put their heads down on their desks if they can’t work; they won’t be in trouble, and they can make up the work later. When they settle down, I may or may not check on them to see if they want to talk then or later, possibly during lunch. Sometimes students just need a minute to collect themselves.

(table continues)

Participant	Response
6	I would try to have the student removed. Safety first. For example, if the student is getting ready to throw a chair. I also may have to remove all of the other students from the room, not the escalated student. If the student is just being disruptive, I will try to take the student out and discuss the issue. I try to talk the student down from escalation. If that doesn't work then I utilize the special education teacher to take the student for a walk. If that doesn't work then I call administration. I try to talk the student down – Do you need a break? Tell me what is going on so that I can help. If another student is agitating, then that student gets removed from the situation. I try to fix the problem before it gets escalated. If student doesn't want to talk to me or another adult. Then I will let the student stay as long as student is not disruptive. If the student needs to just walk, then I let him/her walk. A lot of times that student will talk to the special educator of agitated with me. I just try what I can.
7	Hot passes or passes to leave the room to see the counselor or mentor teacher. I provide a place the students to go in the classroom to chill out – like a safe space. I remain calm to try and bring the student down to a level of calmness. I ask “what can I do to help?” I really try to have a conversation with the student. If it is a really negative behavior, I will have the student removed. I also try to reason with the student. For example, I will have the student use “I statements,” “feel statements,” or have the student draw a picture of how he/she feels.
9	When planned strategies are unsuccessful, my co-teacher and I will discuss how to address it. In the moment, depending on what is happening one of us will try to have a one on one conversation with a student away from the class or give the student a pass on working on the assignment at that point in time and revisit later. We also work to keep the lines of communication open with the families at home. Sometimes students' complete work at home instead of in the classroom and that has worked in the short term. It also depends on the disruption. If the negative behavior is not directly impacting other students' ability to work, I make a note of it and monitor the student until he/she seems ready to take another step. I quietly check in with the student to see if he/she is okay and whether it is a situation I can help with. But if the negative behavior is disruptive to the point of harming himself/herself, or others, or is impacting the class's ability to work, I call on a supportive member (co-teacher, administration, or counselor) to remove the student and help calm him/her down. That is not disciplinary but allows the student to process whatever has triggered the behavior on a private way under the guidance of a trained professional. When the moment passes, he/she usually returns to class and we carry on. When a student with emotional disorders is growing agitated, I tell the student that it seems he/she is growing agitated, and if appropriate, might remind him/her to use self-calming strategies (deep breathing, count to ten or more, touchpoints, visualization, etc.). Once he/she is calm, we can discuss what was happening to cause those feelings and ask that student guiding questions to help him/her either reframe a situation or to solve a problem, or otherwise resolve a conflict/solve a problem.
10	Students with emotional disorders can freely discuss their feelings with me several times throughout the school day. If they feel a need to center themselves during whole group instruction, I have a calming area in the classroom where they can have access to fidgets, and other stress items. They can freely choose movement in the class to help them make choices that work for them. Depending on the reaction, I have had to clear the classroom for safety reasons, I have ignored the behavior, and I have asked the class to continue while I gave that child undivided attention. It depends on what works for the child. They may need a quiet workspace, or they may need to move. They may just need someone to listen to them.
11	If a student becomes agitated, I will suggest the student take a walk to cool down outside of the classroom so that his/her outburst is not on display for the other students to see and respect this student's privacy.
12	If a student with an emotional or behavioral issue did something negative, I would speak with that student just as if they were any of my other students. I would never scold the student or be mean, but I would simply let the student know that their behavior was out of line and not acceptable in my classroom. Then we'd be done. If the behavior is a severe enough action, they would be removed from my classroom. When I see certain students getting agitated or angry, I will write them a hallway pass and allow 5-10 minutes to cool off. This worked incredibly well for me last year

Promoting Peer Relationships for Students with EBDs

The final theme of, promoting peer relationships for students with EBDs answering research question two highlighted how participants utilized students with EBDs peers to minimize inappropriate behaviors (Table 8). Participant responses ranged from using peace circles to a participant running a “Victory in Program,” where students with EBDs participated in an after school program with other students learning about a variety of social skills topics, including team building. One participant mentioned that the peace circle was created to “bring students together to demonstrate to students with EBDs that they are not alone” when dealing with issues in their lives. Students with EBDs discuss and hear classmates talking about the same issues they have gone through or are going through at the present time. This same participant indicated the importance of “putting a positive spin” on answers to a question from students with EBDs to boost their confidence, raising the respect of their classmates. Other participant responses indicated that these teachers will use lunch time to meet with students with EBDs to provide a quieter setting for those students to get work done with a small group of peers, as well as using peers to help with developing writing, pairing students with EBDs with peers in the classroom to complete work, establish peer relationships by assigning “buddies” to help guide students with EBDs to finish assignments and for a personal friend to talk to when they are escalated. Finally, one participant specified the use of “positive peer community recognition” as a successful strategy in promoting peer relationships through the use of a community board in the classroom.

Table 8*Promoting Peer Relationships for Students with EBDs*

Participant	Response
2	Peace circles have been very beneficial to show students with EBDs that they are not alone because they begin to hear their classmates talking about the same issues that they have or are going through. When soliciting answers in class, I try to always put a positive spin on an answer by a student with EBD to boost their confidence and raise the respect their classmates have towards them. I often meet with these kids during lunch. My classroom is open for any student to bring a lunch, work on assignments or in certain circumstances to learn how to be friends. I have been doing this for 6 years and it has been extremely successful. I lovingly refer to them as my own personal "island of misfit toys."
4	Students choose topics that they know and care about, and get help from their friends and myself to develop writings into finished pieces.
6	I pair students with EBDs with students who can basically encourage them to complete work.
7	Establish relationships like assign a buddy that they can talk to in the class when becoming escalated.
8	I give positive peer community recognition, for example, name posted on community board for good work (in classroom). I am in charge of a Victory in Progress (VIP) program. This program promotes social and emotional skills. The program meets Mondays and Wednesdays. It started small, but has grown. Many people volunteer. The program consists of tutoring presentations from a variety of people. We discuss a variety of topics. There are many different activities. It gives students with EBDs opportunities to meet with and talk with other students. Now it has grown in to many different students coming together. We have incorporated team building activities as well. For example, we took all of the kids to an Escape Room.

Research Question 3: Additional Training to Teach Students with EBDs*Professional Development and or Needs*

The final theme that was found from the data analysis answered research question three. This theme was labeled professional development and or needs (Table 9). The research question was answered throughout the interview, as participants were able to speak freely when answering each interview question. There were no specific interview questions about the professional development opportunities attended or needed to be provided from the participants. However, as each participant completed the interview, this information was revealed.

Participant responses ranged from "such is life, it is trial and error," to it requires more time for lessons to be planned for how I am going to reach students with EBDs. It was communicated that some strategies work on some days with a student with EBD, but

may not work on other days with that same student. Furthermore, it was indicated some teachers are not provided the appropriate assistance in the classroom because of the content area that is taught. For example, one participant stated that a paraprofessional is provided because the content area being taught is social studies, and that a paraprofessional cannot modify any assignments. Moreover, it was conveyed that some students with EBDs spend more time outside of the general education classroom, because they spend their time with administration as a result of being removed from the classroom. Another participant suggested that subject material is taught, but students with EBDs struggle to grasp the concepts being taught.

More importantly, it was communicated that teachers do not have the answers, and sometimes students with EBDs are removed because they get so mad it is like a task avoidance mechanism. For example, participant three stated “I feel like some kids spend so much time with administrators because they’re removed from class.” Furthermore, it was indicated that despite attending some professional development, some strategies for successfully teaching students with EBDs were not successful. Participant 12 stated “to be honest, I don’t think I really have any resources to increase my knowledge.” He further expressed that there was google to refer to and old graduate books he could reference, but was not actively seeking those resources out. Still, another participant voiced that testing does not demonstrate the full abilities of a student with EBD due to the testing environment, and that she isn’t sure if anyone knows how to deal with that aspect of testing not representing the full potential of the student with EBD. Another participant communicated that students with EBDs are not successful with the content standards.

While another participant communicated that students with EBDs are behind due to being removed from content area classes previously to entering middle school.

Despite the uncertain communications from several participants, there were some responses that indicated something different. Several participants conveyed that they have attended several professional developments to guide them in teaching students with EBDs in the general education classroom. Utilizing restorative practices was mentioned again from a participant that had been provided the training within the school building she currently taught in presently. Another participant mentioned that they had participated in professional developments offered by the school district titled, “Conscious Discipline.” Conscious Discipline is a classroom management program using activities to teach students social-emotional learning and problem solving to encourage a sense of safety in the classroom (Anderson et al., 2020). Other participants indicated that they had sought out professional development outside of what was offered from the school district. Participant four stated that “I have an extensive library of books pertaining to behavioral health, mental health, and more innovative ways to teach reading and writing” to students with EBDs, as well as “taken several online courses on children’s mental health, recognizing problems, and understanding diversity.”

Table 9*Professional Development Opportunities and Needs*

Participant	Response
1	Such is life. Trial and error. Some strategies work for some students and not for other students. Conversely, some strategies work on some days for a specific student that might not work the next day. I believe there are two musts when it pertains to this question: having a toolbox full of strategies and consistency. The toolbox comes with time and experience. The key is to always be self-evaluating on what is working and what is not.
2	Because I am a US History teacher, I do not have a special educator to support my classes. Instead, I have a special education paraprofessional. Paraprofessionals cannot do not alter or modify assignments.
3	I feel like some kids end up spending so much time with administrators because they're removed from class. I use Restorative Practices and Restorative justice a lot. Restorative Practice and Justice involve: As a community member how can we help "little Johnny" successfully reintegrate into the community? It involves trying to teach to think before they act out, as well as how they were feeling and taking responsibility. It also teaches students how to be a part of the community. I helped create a discipline course using Restorative Practice for teachers in my building, but teachers from the other building were invited. Other building was a title one building also.
4	I have an extensive home library of books that address everything from behavioral issues, mental health issues, to more innovative ways of teaching reading and writing. I have taken several online courses, including one on children's mental health and how to recognize problems, building "grit" in students, and understanding diversity. I subscribe to several blogs that address everything from project learning to better classroom management.
6	I haven't had great success with behavior plans. Usually, I have the special education teacher deal with that part, because I am not really sure and not very experienced with BIPs. I do present the material, but students with EBDs struggle to get the concepts in the material. I feel they are not successful with the standards. I do follow the IEPs, but the special education teacher deals with the FBAs and BIPs. I feel like students with EBDs are behind, maybe due to being removed from their classes in previous years.
7	Sometimes testing data doesn't show full potential of the student due to the environment testing was taking place at the time. It is frustrating, because I am not sure anyone knows how to deal with that aspect of testing not representing the full potential of the student.
8	Sometimes I do not have the answers, kids have left the room, or they get so mad that it's like it is a mechanism for task avoidance. I do attend professional developments. For example, a book club on restorative practices. I also participated in another book club called "So You Want to Talk About Race." These things address cultural and behavioral topics. This was offered at my school, because my school is a title one school.
9	I read professional books and journals, and I have added educational blogs and podcasts. I learn best from other teachers who are in the field doing the work as opposed to theorists who sit back and study it.
10	When planned strategies are unsuccessful, it is back to the drawing board to create a new play. Even if this happens daily. I have taken several PD sessions on Restorative Practice and Conscious Discipline to increase my knowledge to meet students where they are in terms of their emotional and educational development.
12	When I have a student who has emotional or behavioral needs, it requires me to spend more time trying to figure out how I am going to reach those students and how I am going to make them feel included in the class lesson. I could, and have in the past, created completely different lessons for students with certain needs. I have found that it is better for the student to feel as though they're not different and capable of achieving what their peers achieve. In all, it takes much more time for me to plan a lesson for students with emotional or behavioral needs. To be honest, I don't think I really have any resources to increase my knowledge. Of course, there is google to help me out and my old graduate books, but it's not something I actively seek out. Now that I am thinking about it, I will do some more research on the topic before the school year starts.

Document Analysis

The final piece to this study was the document analysis of the professional development opportunities offered by the school district to assist general education teachers' in effectively teaching students with EBDs both academically and behaviorally in the general education classroom. The school board had to be contacted in order to obtain this information. The website had been updated with the new professional development opportunities for the 2020-2021 school year, and the majority of those professional development opportunities dealt with online learning due to students not coming back into the school building until after the first marking period.

The appropriate personnel was contacted electronically requesting a list of the professional development opportunities offered to general education teachers during the 2019-2020 school year for academic and behavioral strategies for teaching students with EBDs in the general education classroom. School board personnel indicated that there were not any professional development opportunities offered to general education teachers dealing with students with EBDs specifically during the 2019-2020 school year, but there were many professional development opportunities offered to teachers called "Conscious Discipline throughout the entire school year at variety of locations (Catterton, personal communication, 2020). The list of these professional developments with dates, times, and locations was sent back electronically.

There were a total of 40 of the "Conscious Discipline" professional developments offered to teachers throughout the 2019-2020 school year (Table 10). Of the total number of times this professional development was offered not a single one of these professional

developments were offered at the middle school level. Each professional development that took place in during a variety of times. The most common time frame was between 8:30 am to 4:00 pm. A few of these trainings did take place during evening hours with the most common time being 5:30 pm to 7:30 pm and then 12:30 pm to 3:30 pm. Despite the fact there were not any of these professional developments offered at a middle school location; there were trainings offered at the school board of education for which any teachers within the school district could have attended according to the school board personnel that provided this information.

The purpose of conducting a document analysis of the professional developments opportunities offered to general education teachers within the school district was to triangulate the data with participant responses. The document analysis illustrated that teachers could attend trainings on “Conscious Discipline” if they chose to do so. Several participants did discuss “Conscious Discipline,” and how strategies from this training had improved teaching methods for students with EBDs in the classroom. However, this was the only professional development offered to general education teachers. Therefore, the fact that “Conscious Discipline” was the only professional development offered aligns with responses from quite a few of the participants. Specifically, several participants believed they were not enough materials or no new resources provided for teaching students with EBDs in the general education classroom.

Table 10*Conscious Discipline Professional Development 2019–2020 School Year*

Location	Number of times offered
Elementary School	12
High school	5
Board of Education	13
Department of Social Services	4
Public Library	4
Another school district	1

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Qualitative research requires a great deal of data collection to create a narrative that is rich in information. Therefore, it is imperative for the investigation to follow procedures to ensure the study is trustworthy. There are several procedures in qualitative research that provide trustworthiness, which include prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and rich and thick data (Kellam & Cirell, 2018; Morse, 2015). For example, the more time a researcher spends establishing relationships with the participants essentially working as partners in the process the more information will be revealed (Morse, 2015; Roberts, 2020). This study involved participants taking part in an individual interview with the researcher by telephone, a video platform, or electronically due to COVID-19 restrictions. Participants who completed the interview electronically were further provided 14 days to review, respond, and return the interview electronically. Regardless of the way participants chose to respond to interview questions, it was important for the researcher to create positive relationships and a relaxing atmosphere with each participant to obtain the most in-depth information from the interview.

Creating a relaxing and reassuring atmosphere for participants yielded more information because participants shared more about their personal experiences. Sharing personal experiences with one another creates an opportunity for more information sharing by participants eliciting stronger responses (Morse, 2015; Roberts, 2020). It was very important to create this atmosphere for the participants through careful planning, preparation of materials, as well as providing meaningful conversation during electronic correspondences and telephone interviews.

This study is further trustworthy due interview questions being aligned with the research questions to obtain accurate information from participants (credibility), and allow for further research possibly from another study. The steps involved in completing this study can be done again to further explore middle school general education teachers' perceptions of teaching students with EBDs in the general education classroom (transferability). Furthermore, the final report provides explicit steps as to how my study was conducted (dependability), and a clear description of the findings both in narrative form and in tables creating a better understanding of the findings for future readers. Finally, conducting a document analysis of the professional development opportunities offered to middle school general education teachers allowed for triangulation of the responses from participants, creating confirmability of the study. Equally as important, each participant was sent a coded summary of his or her coded responses electronically to ensure responses were coded accurately based upon their responses to each interview question and for member checking.

Summary

The intent of this chapter was to present results and provide data analysis based upon the research questions that guided this study. Participants provided a tremendous amount of data during each individual interview. Several participants even provided personal examples to further the explanations they provided. Each research question was answered throughout the entire interview process, as research questions allowed for each participant to discuss their perceptions of how they teach students with EBDs in the general education classroom. Furthermore, participants were able to discuss academic and behavioral strategies they have utilized in their classrooms when teaching students with EBDs, as well as successes and failures. Participants were also able to discuss the professional developments they have participated in to address academic and behavioral strategies for teaching students with EBDs in the general education classroom successfully, as well as discussing what was lacking in the area of professional development. Finally, a document analysis was conducted for the purpose of triangulating participant responses with the professional development opportunities offered by the school district.

In the next chapter, a more comprehensive review of participant responses as they pertained to each research question will be deliberated. A conclusion of participant responses will also be summarized to ascertain perceptions of teaching students with EBDs in the general education classroom, the academic and behavioral strategies implemented when teaching students with EBDs, and professional developments each participant has participated in to successfully teach students with EBDs in the general

education classroom. Finally, limitations of this study, implications, and possible recommendations will be mentioned.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative research study was to explore middle school general education teachers' perceptions of their knowledge of teaching students with EBDs in the classroom. I collected data through interviews without interfering with confidentiality of participants. Understanding these perceptions may lead to increased student achievement as a result of determining strengths and weaknesses of those general education teachers. Improved student achievement can result in a positive learning environment for all students.

Interpretation of the Findings

Participants were able to complete individual interviews by telephone, email, or video conferencing due to the CDC guidelines outlined for the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of each individual interview, there were a total of major themes identified to answer each research question after data were analyzed. The first research question regarding general education teacher perceptions of the knowledge they have about teaching students with EBDs revealed five different themes: (a) strategies planned for teaching students with EBDs, (b) building relationships for students with EBDs, (c) promoting success in the general education classroom for students with EBDs, (d) teacher preparation and classroom management, and (d) student choice for students with EBDs.

The second research question concerning addressing behaviors of students with EBDs in the general education classroom was answered in two separate themes. For the first theme—addressing growing agitation for students with EBDs—participants discussed strategies utilized when behaviors are escalated. The second them—promoting

peer relationships for students with EBDs—demonstrated that participants used positive peer relationships to minimize inappropriate behaviors.

Finally, the third research question in connection with what additional trainings to teach EBDs students would be beneficial was answered in one major theme. This theme dealt solely with professional development opportunities and needs. Participants discussed professional developments they had attended to benefit students with EBDs, and others discussed the lack of opportunities they had been given to teach students with EBDs successfully.

Research Question 1: Perceptions of Knowledge for Teaching Students with EBDs

Participant perceptions of teaching students with EBDs in the general education classroom varied from participant to participant. Quite a few of the participants provided resources as well as academic and behavioral strategies they utilized to promote a positive and successful learning environment for student with EBDs. However, multiple participants communicated that they were unsure about teaching students with EBDs in the classroom since some strategies worked on some days with some of these students. However, on other days the strategies that worked previously no longer were effective for the same students. This may be due to a detachment between knowledge of evidence-based practices and the implementation of these practices when teaching students with EBDs (Cook & Odom, 2013; State et al., 2018). Other participants stated that they were only as good as the information provided to them, and teaching students with EBDs in the classroom was a tremendous concern. For example, general education teachers

communicated that students with EBDs present some of the greatest obstacles on an everyday basis (Scott & Burt, 2018).

Furthermore, students with EBDs were believed to be functioning below their peers without disabilities in all subject areas, because they miss so much instruction from being pulled out of the general education classroom during previous school years. Statistically, students with EBDs have continued to perform below the 25th percentile in overall academics when compared to their peers without disabilities (Gage et al., 2017). One participant voiced that she would like to say she has it figured out but does not when teaching students with EBDs in the general education classroom. It is suggested that general education teachers do express concerns about lacking the necessary strategies and skills to effectively teach students with EBDs in their classrooms (Scott & Burt, 2018; Westling, 2010). The perceptions communicated by participants when teaching students with EBDs in the general education classroom thus supports findings from the literature review as well as the negative feelings general education teachers have about teaching these students.

Despite perceptions of uncertainty, some participants also communicated positive thoughts and feelings about teaching students with EBDs in their classrooms. A number of participants expressed that they felt their teaching styles allowed for positive growth throughout the entire school year for students with EBDs. Importance was placed on creating a community within the classroom, treating students with EBDs like all other students, and building positive relationships with students. One participant admitted that teachers in middle school do not know how to build and maintain positive relationships

with students, including students with EBDs. Negative perceptions about teaching students with EBDs were found to be a contributing factor to poor teacher–student relationships leading to negative academic and behavioral outcomes (Katrien-Koenen et al., 2019). Building positive relationships with students was mentioned quite often by almost every participant interviewed. Therefore, the aspect of building positive relationships with these students was valued as extremely high in creating a successful general education classroom environment by participants in this study.

Research Question 2: Addressing the Behavior of Students with EBDs in the General Education Classroom

Research Question 2 addressed behavioral strategies utilized by participants in their classrooms when teaching students with EBDs. Responses to interview questions varied for each participant. But most participants discussed strategies they used to address escalating behavior or escalated behavior and strategies they implemented to create positive peer relationships to minimize inappropriate behavior. According to scholars, it is fundamental for general education teachers to have a toolbox armed with instructional and behavioral practices that are research-based when teaching students with EBDs to maximize success for these students (Jackson et al., 2017). Participants did communicate some knowledge of behavioral strategies they implemented within their classrooms to address inappropriate behaviors from students with EBDs.

When discussing how participants addressed behaviors that were escalating for a student with EBDs, taking the student to another area to speak to quietly was mentioned a considerable amount of times by participants. Another strategy that was referred to

multiple times was taking a break or going for a walk to calm down. Other strategies that were discussed by participants involved allowing the student to move to a calming area in the room, using a variety of gadgets as calming tools, talking with a preferred adult or peer, and using hand signals and verbal cues to express when a student with EBDs is becoming agitated or escalated. General education teachers who can effectively implement academic and behavioral interventions, assess, and analyze those interventions create more opportunities for students with EBDs to experience success (Davis, 2019; Losinski et al., 2015). Finally, promoting positive peer relationships was valued as moderately high by participants if students with EBDs are to be successful in the general education classroom. Participants discussed options such as peace circles, buddy systems, and pairing students with EBDs with peers that would be a positive influence for the purpose of creating a more successful environment for the students with EBDs.

Despite the explanations of the academic and behavioral strategies participants tried or utilized within their classrooms for students with EBDs, there were a number of participants who believed teaching students with EBDs in the general education classroom was experimental. It was communicated that sometimes instruction has to be stopped to address the behavior as a result of the level of disruption. Furthermore, if the behavior continues to escalate the student must be escorted out of the room by a mediator or another adult, or all other students must be taken out of the room for safety reasons. At this point, the student with the EBD is the only student left in the room with the teacher until assistance arrives. Students with EBDs have higher incidents of demonstrating internalizing and externalizing behaviors as well as lower academic achievement when

compared to their peers without disabilities in the general education classroom (Buchanan et al., 2016). Lastly, it was mentioned that it just depends on what works for the child as well as time and experience being a factor in the amount of strategies a teacher has to try and implement for a students with an EBDs. Although responses from participants highlighted a variety of academic and behavioral strategies utilized in the classroom, the results indicate that some teachers are still not sure on any given day what strategies will be effective for students with EBDs in the general education classroom.

Research Question 3: Additional Training to Teach Students with EBDs

Research Question 3 was answered within the variety of responses pertaining to professional development. Interview questions to participants inadvertently solicited participants to discuss professional development opportunities they attended for academic and behavioral strategies for teaching students with EBDs in the general education classroom. After all, teachers must have appropriate educational training and professional development opportunities in successful academic and behavioral strategies when teaching students with EBDs in the general education setting (Deiterich et al., 2016) Furthermore, interview responses also highlighted deficits for some participants in their knowledge of successful academic and behavioral strategies for teaching EBD students in the general education classroom.

A number of participant responses provided information on the professional development opportunities they had attended to better serve students with EBDs in the general education classroom. However, there were only two professional development opportunities offered to teachers within the school district. One professional development

opportunity (restorative justice and restorative practice) was only offered within a school building to those teachers in that building and one other building. Both school buildings were title one schools where the restorative practice and restorative justice training took place. The second professional development opportunity was mentioned from several participants, and was confirmed through the document analysis (Conscious Discipline). The Conscious Discipline professional development was offered in a variety of locations throughout the school district. The two most common locations were identified to be at the board of education and at the elementary school level. There were no offerings of this professional development in a middle school location. However, any teacher was welcome to attend the Conscious Discipline professional development during any of the offered times (Catterton, personal communication, 2020).

Nonetheless, the majority of participant responses suggested that teachers attended professional development opportunities for successfully teaching students with EBDs academically and behaviorally on their own time. For example, one participant stated she had attended online professional developments on mental health for children, how to recognize problems, and understanding diversity. Furthermore, it was communicated by another participant that resources such as professional books and journals were utilized to provide assistance on how to effectively teach students with EBDs, both academically and behaviorally in the classroom. It was further expressed that testing data does not illustrate the full potential of a student with EBD due to the testing environment, and he/she was not sure anyone knows how to address that problem. Another participant discussed creating two completely different lessons for instruction in

the classroom. One for students with EBDs, and the other lesson for the rest of the class. Finally, it was voiced that resources have not been provided to increase knowledge of teaching students with EBDs successfully alongside their peers without disabilities. Current literature does support this notion, since general education teachers' do communicate that they feel inadequately prepared to teach students with EBDs in their classrooms (Burke et al., 2015; Mann, 2018; Mooney et al., 2004)

Limitations of the Study

This study had several limitations that could influence the results. First of all, the study took place within a school district located on the Eastern Coast of the United States. Subjects were chosen from the middle schools within that school district. The results of the study would be difficult to apply to elementary school general education teachers, as well as high school teachers both within the school district and outside of that school district. Furthermore, whether general education teachers within the school district utilized academic and behavioral strategies they have learned to teach students with EBDs consistently was determined to be different for each participant.

More importantly, although the identified problem is a subject of concern at the national level, my study was conducted to be applied at the district wide school level. Additionally, participant involvement was limited to only eleven participants. There were twelve participants, but one participant actually dropped out to the study, stating that she was too busy to complete the interview. Finally, the majority of the general education teachers that were asked to participate in the study refused to respond, despite the multiple efforts by the researcher to recruit more participants.

Recommendations

Professional Development

Based upon the results of this study, it is recommended that more professional development opportunities should be offered to all general education teachers for effectively teaching students with EBDs in the general education classroom, both academically and behaviorally. General educators need to be provided professional development to improve instructional and behavioral practices (Floress, Beschta, et al., 2017). It was clear that certain schools labeled as title one had more knowledge of academic and behavioral strategies for teaching students with EBDs in the general education classroom.

Participants from title I schools provided responses with a wide range of instructional strategies that they utilized in the classroom as opposed to those participants who did not teach in title one schools. Those teachers within the title one schools were also much more positive about teaching students with EBDs in the general education classroom. For example, those participants in the title I school buildings discussed Restorative Practice and Justice, promoting positive student-teacher relationships, and actively seeking out students with EBDs throughout the school day to find out what moods those students were in so that the lesson could be successfully modified to fit that student that day.

Participants who did not teach in title one school settings voiced some knowledge of academic and behavioral strategies for successfully teaching students with EBD in the general education classroom. However, providing every teacher with evidence based

practices such as positive supports, mentoring and relationship building supports, and accuracy of intervention execution may improve academic success for students with EBDs (Kern, 2015; Kirby, 2017; Raigoza, 2019; Regan & Michaud, 2011). Students with EBDs do not just attend title one schools.

Participants in the school not labeled title one expressed that they utilize books, journals, and online resources to assist them in successfully teaching students with EBDs in their classrooms. Participant responses yielded results such as utilizing differentiation, proximity, positive reinforcement, chunking of assignments, shortening assignments, and even creating two different lesson plans. Furthermore, participants not teaching in title one schools conveyed more uncertainty in teaching students with EBDs in the classroom.

For example, it was communicated that certain subject areas in these buildings did not receive qualified personnel to support students with EBDs in the classroom. It was further expressed that the teacher is the partner for students with EBDs when partner work is assigned to avoid any issues. Finally, one participant clearly stated that he/she had not been provided with resources to increase knowledge of teaching students with EBDs successfully, both academically and behaviorally.

Further Research

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore middle school general education teachers' perceptions of their knowledge of teaching students with EBDs in the classroom. This study focused on teacher perceptions, academic and behavioral strategies utilized in the classroom, and professional development offered district wide. This study did not focus on professional development opportunities offered at individual school

buildings for teaching students with EDB academically and behaviorally. Therefore, future research may be suggested to focus on professional development opportunities offered within individual school buildings in a school district to determine if strategies for successfully teaching students with EBDs academically and behaviorally in the general education classroom is addressed at the school level rather than district level for middle school teachers.

Implications

As a result of this study, I was able to determine that more professional development may be need to be offered at the district level for middle school general education teachers to successfully teaching students with EBDs, both academically and behaviorally. Students with EBDs are now required to spend most of their day in the general education setting (Jackson et al., 2017). However, the drop-out rates within the 2011-2012 school year for students with EBDs once leaving middle school reached 38.1% due to ineffective academic and behavioral practices in the general education classroom setting (Jackson et al., 2017). Through this study, I was able to gain a deeper understanding for general education teachers' perceptions of the knowledge they have about teaching students with EBDs. Having a deeper understanding of these middle school teachers' needs may now allow school district leaders to plan and implement trainings committed to presenting positive academic and behavioral strategies for students with EBDs in their classrooms.

Academic progress for students with EBDs continues to be a concern for the field of education as noted by current research. Students with EBDs continue to exhibit

academic achievement gaps in content areas such as reading and behavioral achievement that include internalizing and externalizing behaviors in the academic setting (Billingsley et al., 2018; Vostal & Lee, 2015; Young, 2019). Through this study, I was able to provide more understanding into general education teachers' perceptions of knowledge for teaching students with EBDs. The information presented in this study can also be used for school buildings to create professional development opportunities to address those needs for the sole purpose of creating a positive and successful learning environment for students with EBDs in the general education classroom. Furthermore, general education teachers may in turn have more positive attitudes about teaching students with EBDs in the general education setting.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to provide a better understanding of middle school general education teacher perceptions of the knowledge they have about teaching students with EBDs, both academically and behaviorally. Participant responses allowed for a deeper understanding into what strategies middle school general education teachers use in their classrooms, as well as the perceptions they have about teaching students with EBDs with regard to professional development needs. Each participant demonstrated some knowledge of strategies that can be utilized to effectively instruct students with EBDs in the general education classroom. Participant responses ranged from utilizing differentiation, to proximity, positive reinforcement, chunking of assignments, shortening assignments, and even creating two different lesson plans. Other participants discussed using break passes or allowing those students with EBDs to take walks when they are

upset. Creating positive relationships with these students was found to be something that multiple participants found to be important for academic and behavioral success for students with EBDs. Finally, despite the positive implications of this study there is still a number of participants that were not sure how to better serve students with EBDs in the classroom so that they are academically and behaviorally successful.

Having a deeper understanding of these middle school general education teachers' needs may now allow school district leaders to plan and implement trainings committed to presenting positive academic and behavioral strategies for students with EBDs in their classrooms. The information presented in the study can be also be used for school leaders in individual school buildings to create professional development opportunities to address those needs for the sole purpose of creating a positive and successful learning environment for students with EBDs in the general education classroom. Furthermore, general education teachers may, in turn, have more positive attitudes about teaching students with EBDs in the general education setting. As a result of this study, positive social change may result from teachers being able to provide a more effective learning environment through appropriate professional development for teaching students with emotional and behavioral disorders.

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Appendix: Research Study Interview Questions

Interview questions are as follows:

1. Describe how your students' emotional and behavioral needs impact your daily lesson planning?
2. How does your instruction lead to gains in self-esteem or self-actualization?
3. Specifically, how do your lessons/instruction lead to positive behavioral growth that impacts learning?
4. What are some strategies you utilize to promote continued engagement of students with emotional or behavioral disorders in the academic lesson?
5. How does your instructional and behavioral support plan consider students backgrounds, culture, and emotional or behavioral needs?
6. How do you utilize students' FBAs, IEPs, and the state standards to develop behavioral and academic instructional outcomes?
7. What types of resources do you utilize to increase your knowledge and skills for working with students with emotional or behavioral disorders?
8. What adaptations have been made to meet the emotional and behavioral needs of your students when planned strategies are unsuccessful?
9. What would your reaction be if a negative behavior occurred in the classroom?
10. What techniques do you use when dealing with a student with emotional and behavioral needs who is growing agitated?