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Perceptions of Exemplary Special Education Teachers:
Instructional and Management Strategies
For Special Education Students

by

Shawna Dawn Gruben

November 4, 2019

A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University in
Partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education
School of Education

Perceptions of Exemplary Special Education Teachers:
Instructional and Management Strategies
for Special Education Students

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Shawna Dawn Gruben

This Dissertation has been approved as partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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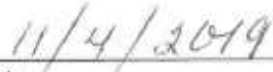
Dr. Brad Hanson, Dissertation Chair



Date



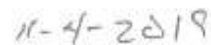
Dr. Sherry DeVore, Committee Member



Date



Dr. Kent Medlin, Committee Member



Date

Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree.

Full Legal Name: Shawna Dawn Gruben

Signature:  Date: 11.4.2019

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my parents, Steve and Lois, for their continual support and encouragement in all things I have aspired to accomplish. Thank you to my father for teaching me how to persevere through hard work and for reminding me to always keep smiling. Thank you to my mother for instilling me with the passion, love, and support that can only be provided through a loving mother's desire for her child to be all she dreamed possible. I would like to thank my husband, Bryan, for his example of unwavering commitment and perseverance. Thank you, Bryan, for loving, supporting, and encouraging me through my educational journey.

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Abstract

Students with disabilities are to be educated alongside their peers to the maximum extent possible as required by federal and state regulations. Research suggests students with disabilities are more successful when placed with peers in the general education classroom with appropriate support. This study was conducted to examine specific best-practice strategies used by exemplary special education teachers. The participants within this study have been identified as Clarissa Hug Teacher of the Year Award recipients by the Council for Exceptional Children and are considered to be exemplary in the field of special education. Three research questions guided the study using the conceptual framework of Harry Wong. Participants were asked seven open-ended interview questions. Each interview question was designed to elicit specific details about the participant's use of instructional and behavioral strategies. Interview data showed several thematic commonalities between participants to include: climate and environment; relationships and attitude; instruction; procedure and expectations; engagement and motivation; incentives, rewards, and reinforcements; and discipline and consequences. Research suggests when teachers employ specific classroom management strategies, all students are more successful. Classroom management strategies can ensure students are successful both academically and behaviorally within all educational environments. The findings of this study supported a strong connection between the use of effective classroom strategies and successful student outcomes.

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Chapter One: Introduction

School systems within the United States experienced an increase in the number of students with disabilities identified under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) from 1990-1991 to 2014-2015 (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2017). The NCES (2017) detailed the IDEA identification of students with disabilities in 1990-1991. At that time, there were 4.7 million students (11%) compared to 6.6 million students, or 13% of the total public school population, in 2014-2015 (NCES, 2017, p. 1).

Chapter One includes evidence of the continued and increasing need for educational focus in the area of special education. An overview of important foundational information in the field of special education is provided. Certain strategies that can be employed by teachers which have substantial effects on students (Marzano & Marzano, 2015) are discussed. According to Hawpe (2013), students with disabilities are more successful when educated with their peers in the regular education classroom. The most important factor to determine student academic achievement and success is the effectiveness of the teacher to implement certain classroom management practices and procedures that maximize instruction and learning (Wong & Wong, 2009; Wong, Wong, Jondahl, & Ferguson, 2014).

Background of the Study

In 1975, Public Law 94-142, or the Education for All Handicapped Children Act was enacted by Congress (USDOE, 2010). The law provided a foundation of guidance for states to support children with disabilities and their families (USDOE, 2010). The Education for All Handicapped Children Act progressed through reauthorizations into the

current guidance as the IDEA 2004 (USDOE, 2017a, 2017b). These regulations mandate a free appropriate public education (FAPE) for all students aged 3-21 who have been identified as having a disability under the IDEA (USDOE, 2017a). Generally, a FAPE includes special education and related services at public expense designed to meet the individual needs of students with disabilities (USDOE, 2017b).

The USDOE Center for Parent Information and Resources (CPIR) specified the least restrictive environment (LRE) as the educational placement which allows students with disabilities to receive an education with their non-disabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate (CPIR, 2017b; USDOE, 2017a, 2017b). The regulation expresses a strong preference for the placement of students with disabilities within a regular education environment alongside peers (CPIR, 2017a). It is the responsibility of public schools to ensure students with disabilities are properly located, identified, and provided special education and related services in accordance with the IDEA (USDOE, 2017a).

Former Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings summarized accountability through the IDEA:

The days when we looked past the underachievement of these students are over.

No Child Left Behind and the IDEA 2004 have not only removed the final barrier separating special education from general education, they also have put the needs of students with disabilities front and center. Special education is no longer a peripheral issue. It's central to the success of any school. (USDOE, 2010, para. 6)

The USDOE (2017a) ensures the federal government supports states in their efforts to provide a FAPE to a largely diverse and ever-changing student population within public schools.

Foundational information is vital and an important factor for all involved in the ultimate goal of providing students with opportunities to achieve their full academic potential (Baker, 2016). Students with disabilities can be successful in a variety of educational settings if the environments include the appropriate supports (Hawpe, 2013). According to Hawpe (2013), successful inclusion of students with disabilities should include high expectations for all students, flexibility, and individualization to meet each learner's needs, student engagement, the content presented in multiple ways, and the expression of student understanding in various ways.

Marzano and Marzano (2015) indicated teachers who engage in specific strategies or take specific actions in classrooms have substantial effects on students. Harlacher (2015) additionally expressed that specific strategies correlate with effective classroom management. According to Wong and Wong (2009) and Wong et al. (2014), the most important factor for student achievement is an effective teacher who implements a consistent classroom management plan with practices and procedures.

Harlacher (2015) concluded effective classroom management creates a foundation for student academic success. A positive school environment should support students, engage them in instruction, provide a safe and secure feeling, and prepare them with essential skills, which can be used for academic and future achievements (USDOE, 2014). According to the USDOE (2014), schools should ensure a positive environment where all students are held to high expectations.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was selected and based on the publications of Harry K. Wong. A strong preference is indicated by the USDOE to place

students with disabilities in the LRE with peers in regular education (CPIR, 2017a). According to the CPIR (2017a), students with disabilities should be educated to the maximum extent appropriate alongside their peers in regular education classes. Wong and Wong (2009) conveyed effective teachers implement key strategies that work in all classrooms with all students with modifications. Effective teachers implement consistent classroom management procedures and practices to optimize instruction and learning (Wong & Wong, 2009; Wong et al., 2014). These teachers additionally set high expectations for student success and ensure instructional lesson mastery (Wong et al., 2014).

A variety of classroom management practices are used by teachers (Rusk, 2016). Further analysis, as suggested by Rusk (2016), could create a better understanding of the effectiveness of the various practices. Students with disabilities are able to perform better academically and socially when educated in the regular education environment (Hawpe, 2013). Bouer (2013) indicated the placement of students with disabilities in the regular education setting for social and behavioral benefits is also beneficial for academic achievement.

Wong and Wong (2009) suggested the most important and influential factor for increased student learning is the skill and knowledge of the teacher. The effectiveness of the teacher has the greatest impact on student achievement (Wong & Wong, 2009; Wong et al., 2014). Effective teachers are able to maximize student learning while facilitating minimum student misbehavior (Wong & Wong, 2009). According to Wong and Wong (2009), "School is where people go to acquire knowledge, learn skills, and develop

values that will make them productive citizens and help them grow to their fullest potential” (p. 7).

Statement of the Problem

Researchers have begun to focus on the social and behavioral benefits of inclusion for students with disabilities within the general education classroom setting (Bouer, 2013). Placement within the general education setting for potential behavioral and social benefits, according to Bouer (2013), can be as valuable as academic achievement. Bulson (2015) asserted, “Students desire authentic relationships where they are trusted, given responsibility, spoken to honestly and warmly, and treated with dignity” (p. 53).

One of the most important factors for students with disabilities, as stated by Hawpe (2013), is the attitude, relationship, and influence of the teacher. This influences how successfully the student with disabilities is integrated into the classroom by the teacher and also influences peers (Hawpe, 2013). According to Wong and Wong (2009), students perform and produce results based on what the teacher expects and what expectations are conveyed to students.

Rusk (2016) suggested all teachers should use a variety of classroom management practices. Once educators understand the effectiveness of various practices, they can reduce classroom disruptions (Rusk, 2016) and create learning environments conducive to teaching and learning (Coleman, 2012). Effective teachers, as defined by Wong and Wong (2009) and Wong et al. (2014), are able to maximize learning and minimize student misbehavior through consistent classroom management practices and procedures.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify specific best-practice instructional and management strategies special education teachers use to effectively instruct and manage the behavior of special education students in a variety of classroom placements. The information identified through this study will serve to guide teachers in assisting special education students to successfully participate in both special and regular education placements. The study was designed to identify specific strategies teachers can implement to assist special education students in both special and regular education placements.

The strategies identified were reported and observed by exemplary special education teachers, as evidenced by their award recipient status as Clarissa Hug Teachers of the Year by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC). As expressed by Reese (2012), classroom management requires appropriate management strategies delivered by effective teachers. General and special education teachers must collaborate and support students with disabilities in general education classrooms (Hawpe, 2013). According to Rusk (2016), a variety of classroom management practices are used by teachers. Further analysis of these practices may create a clearer understanding of the effectiveness of the various practices (Rusk, 2016).

Students with disabilities are better able to perform academically and socially when educated in a regular education environment (Hawpe, 2013). Smith and Dearborn (2016) reported teaching goes beyond content. Teaching is essentially instructing students in life skills vital to student success, within the school, as well as outside of school (Smith & Dearborn, 2016); therefore, the overarching purpose of the study was

to identify what best-practice strategies, if any, could be used by both special and regular education teachers within a variety of educational placements to provide optimal instruction and to manage behavior of special education students.

Research questions. The following questions guided this study:

1. What strategies do exemplary special education teachers use to instruct special education students?
2. What strategies do exemplary special education teachers use to manage behavior of special education students?
3. What types of professional learning have contributed to exemplary special education teachers' best-practices for instructing and managing behavior?

Significance of the Study

Certain strategies must be identified and implemented by classroom teachers for all students to participate and be a part of regular education placements. The information obtained through this study may help students with disabilities by allowing them to participate in the regular education setting to the maximum extent possible. The perspectives and testimonies of exemplary teachers may provide guidance for educators who work with students with disabilities and their peers.

This study will add to the existing research by identifying effective strategies used by exemplary special education teachers to instruct and manage the behavior of special education students in a variety of educational placements. The information in the study can potentially influence teacher preparation programs through the integration of the research information into introductory courses. Additionally, the strategies identified

through this study have the potential to be incorporated into professional improvement plans to improve teacher effectiveness when working with students with disabilities.

Definition of Key Terms

For the purposes of this study, the following terms are defined:

Child with a disability. A child with a disability requires special education and related services due to mental retardation, hearing impairments (including deafness), speech or language impairments, visual impairments (including blindness), emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments, or specific learning disabilities (USDOE, 2017b).

Classroom management. Classroom management includes the practices and procedures a teacher develops and implements “to maintain an environment in which instruction and learning can occur” (Wong & Wong, 2009, p. 11).

Instructional strategies. Instructional strategies are specific plans or actions used by teachers to create a learning environment that provides students with the knowledge to develop understandings, extend learning, and apply knowledge (Ainsworth, 2010; Dean, Hubbell, Pitler, & Stone, 2012).

Limitations and Assumptions

A qualitative researcher is required to interpret data which can potentially lead to favorable or unfavorable conclusions through unintentional bias (Creswell, 2014b). The interview questions were created by the researcher and consequently were a limitation of the study. The researcher developed seven open-ended interview questions to answer three research questions. Interview questions were designed to be open-ended to elicit participant information without restraint (Creswell, 2015).

The participants for this study were selected from the CEC's Clarissa Hug Teacher of the Year Award recipients within the last 10 years. An important consideration is the limited sample size, as stated by Creswell (2015), making it difficult for the sample to provide an accurate reflection of the population. The study was limited to participants who were willing to participate and were available for contact through email. Participants were asked to voluntarily participate in an interview; therefore, interviewee availability was a limitation of this study.

Current available research is primarily focused on regular education students placed in regular education classrooms. Research specifically related to special education is limited. Most research related to classroom management is focused on regular education students placed in regular education classrooms and is not specified for students with disabilities. Therefore, the availability of relevant literature was considered a limitation of the study. An assumption was accepted that the responses of the participants were offered honestly and without bias.

Summary

Placing students with disabilities alongside their peers in the least restrictive educational placement to the maximum extent appropriate is specified as a preference by the CPIR (2017). According to Bouer (2013), general education has seen significant growth in the inclusion of students with significant disabilities over the past 30 years. As communicated by Hawpe (2013), if the educational environment is supportive, students with disabilities can be successful in a variety of educational placements. Substantial effects can be observed in the classroom when teachers engage in specific strategies (Marzano & Marzano, 2015). Bouer (2013) described placement in general education

classrooms for academic achievement of students with disabilities can also be a valuable placement for potential positive behavioral and social benefits.

The purpose of this study was to identify specific best-practice strategies to instruct and manage the behavior of students with disabilities in a variety of classroom placements. Exemplary special education teachers shared the strategies they have found successful when serving students with disabilities. Continued analysis in the research area will create a better understanding of both special and general education teachers when instructing and managing special education students. As stated by Wong and Wong (2009), “There is no greater gift one human being can give another than the opportunity to learn and grow in a loving and nurturing learning environment” (p. 49).

The literature review in Chapter Two is a summary of studies focused on topics related to instructing and managing behaviors in the classroom. Research studies primarily focus on research in regular education classrooms with regular education students, although some research additionally includes information specific to students with disabilities. The chapter concludes with a summary of the research on teacher preparation.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

Hawpe (2013) stated, “Students with mild to the most severe disabilities can be successful in a variety of settings if people are willing to provide the supports needed in those environments to support the student” (p. 18). Harlacher (2015) suggested teachers can use a proactive approach to “create and teach expectations and rules, establish procedures and structure, reinforce expectations, actively engage students, manage misbehavior, and address the unique needs of the individual students” (p. 14). By examining the different approaches that are appropriate to serve the students, one’s understanding of the scope of this topic expands.

Chapter Two is a synopsis of the literature presented as a general summary of components associated with serving the needs of students with disabilities. The main topics included in this chapter are discussed to offer the reader an understanding of relevant knowledge within the area. Beginning the chapter is a discussion of the conceptual framework. The framework for this study was developed from the work of Wong and Wong (2009). Classroom management; climate and environment; and incentives, rewards, and reinforcements are presented. To further expand the review of relevant literature, the topics of discipline and consequences, relationships and attitudes, and instruction are offered. Completing the review are discussions of procedures and expectations as well as engagement and motivation specific to students with disabilities.

Conceptual Framework

The most significant factor in determining student achievement can be directly correlated to the ability of a teacher to set high expectations, use consistent practices and procedures in classroom management, and deliver lesson mastery to create an effective

classroom (Wong & Wong, 2009). According to Wong and Wong (2009), what works well in one classroom works in all classrooms with modifications. Effective teachers are able to develop and maintain a classroom environment using expectations and procedures to ensure student achievement (Wong et al., 2014). Wong et al. (2014) conveyed that effective teachers are able to create an environment where instruction and learning occur.

Classroom Management

According to Sieberer-Nagler (2016), classroom management involves all the aspects, efforts, and implications of rules, routines, settings, and environmental arrangements. Wong and Wong (2009) suggested classroom management is “all of the things that a teacher does to organize students, space, time, and materials so that student learning can take place” (p. 85). One of the most influential factors for teacher success is classroom management with an effect size of 0.52 (Hattie & Zierer, 2018). As stated by Hattie and Zierer (2018), “Good classroom management is a scene-setter for trust to be built” (pp. 45-46). The most effective classrooms use preventative strategies to ensure learning occurs (Hattie & Zierer, 2018). As specified by Wong et al. (2014), management is a defined system or plan created by the manager which is then implemented, guided, and assessed by the manager into a continual cycle of improvement.

An effective teacher understands that classroom management begins on the first day of school (Foley, n.d.). When a teacher considers what classroom management plan is most effective, it is important to understand most implementations considered effective are successful at any grade level and in all subject areas (Kratochwill, DeRoos, & Blair, 2017). A successful teacher is an individual who is able to create a classroom

management plan and implement the plan (Rusk, 2016). Reese (2012) indicated effective teachers use different classroom management plans and strategies based on the differences of their students. Student success each year depends on the levels of the students and the teachers' values, beliefs, and personalities (Reese, 2012). As described by Lewis (2016), each academic year, teachers enter classrooms and bring positive and negative experiences that are used to convey knowledge, execute authority, and adjust to students who differ each year.

Kratochwill et al. (2017) posed the question, "Why is classroom management important?" (para. 2). Student outcomes are correlated to the environment in a classroom where "increased meaningful academic learning facilitates social and emotional growth" (Kratochwill et al., 2017, para. 2). Kratochwill et al. (2017) additionally indicated the environment within the classroom can reduce behaviors and improve academic engagement. Wilkinson (2013) indicated effective planning and instructional strategies can create a more positive classroom environment influencing students' developmental outcomes.

Classroom management involves setting clear behavioral and learning goals, expectations, and being supportive (Dion, 2016). As reported by Hattie and Zierer (2018), goals which are clearly understood by students are indicated to have an effect size of 0.50. Fisher, Frey, Quaglia, Smith, and Lande (2018) conveyed the need for teachers to clearly articulate that expectations for behavior and interest in learning are the same for all students. Teachers must act as the model leaders, which changes their role from management to leaders, enabling them to shift the paradigm (Covey, Covey, Summers, & Hatch, 2014).

As outlined by Reese (2012), effective classroom management constantly occurs every hour of every day, where all aspects influence student success. Kratochwill et al. (2017) outlined effective classroom management as identifying and setting expectations for behaviors and learning. Effective classroom management reduces problems and disruptive behavior and enhances learning and academic achievement (Reinke, Stormont, Herman, & Newcomer, 2014; Rusk, 2016). As reported by the USDOE (2008), “Well managed classrooms prevent many disciplinary problems and provide an environment that is favorable to learning” (p. 20).

In summary, a classroom management plan is developed and implemented by the teacher (Rusk, 2016). Effective classroom management is implemented the first day of school then guided by the teacher and improved upon throughout the school year (Wong et al., 2014). Successful plans are founded in preventative measures to reduce behaviors through a strategically developed positive classroom environment with clear expectations (Hattie & Zierer, 2018). Instructional gains are assured when the educational environment is supportive, engaging, and high expectations are placed on learning and achievement (Dion, 2016).

Climate and Environment

As reported by Gregory and Kaufeldt (2015), the attitude of the teacher towards students is the most motivating element in the classroom. Fisher et al. (2018) suggested teachers intentionally develop a welcoming and supportive classroom through practices and procedures. Teachers should take an interest in students’ lives, greet students by name at the door, and talk informally about their extracurricular activities (Gregory & Kaufeldt, 2015). Wong and Wong (2009) agreed, “When you address someone by name,

you are treating that person with dignity and respect” (p. 69). To strengthen the feeling of community, an environment must create mutual feelings of trust and belonging (Hattie & Zierer, 2019).

Jennings (2015) suggested important student outcomes, both academically and emotionally, are developed through supporting a healthy classroom and school. Teachers and students develop healthy, productive relationships through positive classroom environments (Fisher et al., 2018). Teachers must create developmentally appropriate environments where relationships are personally developed (Gregory & Kaufeldt, 2015).

Building and sustaining an environment that is rich in authentic conversations are essential for building social connections within the classroom (Souers & Hall, 2016). Highly effective teachers often use strategies to maintain a positive classroom where every student succeeds (Wilkinson, 2013). Souers and Hall (2016) reported when the environment is consistent and reliable, using logic during conversations, the chances of experiencing disruptive or defiant behavior are reduced. The teacher must pay attention to what students are saying through active listening, which conveys to students that their feelings and emotions are important (Marzano, 2017). Souers and Hall (2016) suggested this relationship helps teachers develop healthy connections within the classroom where students are emotionally connected and are able to make more thorough decisions.

Fisher et al. (2018) suggested creating a safe environment where teachers become involved in the emotional lives of their students. According to Marzano and Marzano (2015), the most direct way to encourage appropriate behavior is to make students feel a sense of belonging. Teachers develop a welcoming environment where students feel accepted and valued (Marzano & Marzano, 2015).

Gregory and Kaufeldt (2015) believed that showing interest in the students' lives requires little and costs nothing. A supported learning environment is created when the teacher knows the personalities of each student (Souers & Hall, 2016) and has unconditional support and regard for the students (Gregory & Kaufeldt, 2015). When a safe environment is established, and positive relationships are cultivated, students are able to show what they know (Souers & Hall, 2016). According to Souers and Hall (2016), this is the first step in helping students develop emotional and behavioral management regulations appropriately.

The environment, as suggested by Fisher et al. (2018), creates opportunities for students to develop and improve skills through curiosity, asking questions, and pursuing clarification or redirection comfortably. The perception of a conducive learning environment is visible through clearly articulated procedures and rules (Marzano & Marzano, 2015). Chenoweth (2017) suggested teachers can maximize learning through the organization of their physical space. Successful classroom dynamics are observed when students discuss the topic and ask questions while the teacher circulates the room talking, questioning, and listening (Chenoweth, 2017).

Marzano (2017) explained that when the classroom feels relaxed and comfortable, the teacher will be able to continue building the teacher-to-student relationship while additionally building the student-to-student relationship. Through the normal flow of teaching and learning effective teachers connect and interact with every student every class (Wong & Wong, 2014). Gregory and Kaufeldt (2015) stated, "Laughter is of great use in the classroom. It relieves tension and stress, raises endorphins, sends oxygenated

blood to the brain, boosts the immune system, and creates episodic memorable experiences” (p. 53).

Hattie and Zierer (2018) suggested using laughter to remove pressure within the classroom. According to Antonetti and Garver (2015), stress chemicals are reduced through laughter, movement, and food since these activities trigger the production of chemicals which reduce stress and help cognition. When teachers are able to manage their own emotions and behavior appropriately during times of heightened emotion or stress, their actions can be modeled by students (Souers & Hall, 2016).

Coleman (2012) indicated when a school is reported to have a negative culture, it increases the likelihood and risk of student misbehavior. Coleman (2012) stated that responsibility cannot be completely focused on teachers. Administrators must additionally be responsible to improve school climate, which “appears to have an impact on classroom behavior” (Coleman, 2012, p. 27).

Policies and educational reforms are based on the reauthorization of the IDEA of 2004 and the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. These mandates require school districts to provide students with an educational placement in the least restrictive environment (Bouer, 2013). According to Bouer (2013), individuals who support inclusion within the classroom report increased achievement of students with disabilities due to the high quality and standards of general education classrooms. Bulson (2015) indicated positive outcomes and stated, “Students perceived they had positive relationships with their teachers, they demonstrated more effort and perseverance, and had a greater sense of belonging in addition to higher...behavioral engagement...and increased emotional engagement” (pp. 49-50).

Johnson (2013) expressed that factors in school and outside of school can impact student behaviors. An individual's levels of understanding of outside factors determine the prevention of and intervention for disruptive behaviors (Johnson, 2013). As stated by Gruenert and Whitaker (2015), "We tend to behave as we're expected by other members of each group" (p. 41). Covey et al. (2014) found high-risk behavior lessens when students are attached to prosocial peers and teachers. According to Coleman (2012), when a school has a positive school culture, misbehavior is reduced. Johnson (2013) further explained that the largest adjustment problems within schools are for children who come from severely dysfunctional families. Teachers need to create outcomes which are socially valued based on an understanding of the underlying causes of behavior for individual students (Dion, 2016).

According to Coleman (2012), student behavior can be derived from three areas, which include failure of staff to consider and accommodate individual student differences, failure to correctly identify and provide clarity for rules and consequences, and failure to be equipped with appropriate support staff. Benson (2014) identified transitions as one of the most challenging tasks students encounter. Student success, as detailed by Benson (2014), occurs when the environment is differentiated to meet all student needs. Considerations must be made to every environment and how the encounter is received by the student through sounds and smells, lighting and visuals, noise and tone, and textures (Benson, 2014).

In summary, developing and maintaining a welcoming and supportive classroom environment is a priority for effective teachers (Fisher et al., 2018). Effective teachers understand they must establish trust with their students and offer emotional support to

ensure the students feel a caring relationship has been developed and the teacher is invested in their lives (Fisher et al., 2018; Hattie & Zierer, 2019). When students feel valued by the teacher positive relationships are developed within a classroom environment allowing the teacher to use the relationships to manage behavior and maximize learning (Souers & Hall, 2016).

Incentives, Rewards, and Reinforcement

Rather than reacting to behavior, schools have been investing more time in the prevention of problem behaviors (Rusk, 2016). Dion (2016) suggested educators who want to increase positive behavior should implement a school-wide positive behavioral support system to increase academic success and improve overall school climate. It is important to use both individual and group reinforcers for behavior and to remind students often of appropriate behaviors (Rusk, 2016). As stated by Souers and Hall (2016), “Implementing healthy intervention strategies beforehand diverts our students’ reactionary responses” (p. 63).

Classroom management systems should provide a varying level of reinforcers, given frequently in a consistent manner (Rusk, 2016). Wong et al. (2014) emphasized the importance of using verbal reinforcement to coach and guide students with prompts and affirmations, specifically. Gregory and Kaufeldt (2015) suggested using a variety of options identified by student choice for reinforcement, which encourages students to be engaged in learning. The learning process cannot begin without motivation, and learning cannot be maintained without motivation (Hattie & Zierer, 2018). Additionally, Hattie and Zierer (2018) suggested teachers vary their methods of motivation since not all students can be motivated using the same strategy.

According to Chenoweth (2017), teachers must develop a system to build motivation to help provide the students with a desire to succeed. Teachers, in collaboration with the students, must use graphs to visually track the students' progress toward achievement (Wiliam, 2018). Wiliam (2018) suggested that when students are involved in the action of tracking their progress, they are three times more likely to show progress over those who do not track their progress. This action, according to Fisher et al. (2018), provides opportunities for students to self-reflect as well as allows teachers to develop teaching strategies specific to the student.

As stated by Fisher et al. (2018), "The strategy is to support students in taking responsibility for their engagement in the learning process" (p. 150). Chenoweth (2017) suggested that monitoring systems be used to communicate progress or lack of progress to teachers, students, and parents. Furthermore, the monitoring system can be used to monitor the students' progress toward grade-level standards (Chenoweth, 2017). Wiliam (2018) indicated when teachers used evidence to make instructional decisions concerning what to plan next, students will learn.

Collaborative data monitoring between the students and teacher allows the students to identify and recognize areas where they struggle and where they are successful (Fisher et al., 2018). Gregory and Kaufeldt (2015) suggested these actions improve engagement through communication and analyzing student progress assisting the students in becoming more active in their learning process, creating enhanced motivation future learning. Marzano (2017) emphasized the importance of helping students understand their errors and reasoning to provide a greater overall logic of the information present to them and their understanding of the content.

Harlacher (2015) stated that behavior-specific praise used with both elementary and secondary students is effective for improving social behavior and academics. As opposed to general praise, behavior-specific praise provides students with more direction, which ultimately reduces behavior issues (Harlacher, 2015). Selfridge (2014) communicated that it is essential to provide specific praise following the observation of a desired behavior. The praise must be delivered as quickly as possible, be worded as specifically as possible, and be provided as often as observed (Selfridge, 2014).

As teachers become better classroom managers and student focus increases, students will rely less on the use of rewards and consequences (Smith & Dearborn, 2016). According to Marzano (2017), the teacher can also positively reinforce students by acknowledging their decisions and communicating gratitude for those decisions made appropriately. A combination of rewards and punishments used within classroom management can reduce and prevent misbehaviors while strengthening the relationship between teacher and student (Rusk, 2016).

In summary, effective teachers employ classroom management systems that incorporate classroom incentives, rewards, or reinforcements, which are used to further enhance learning through motivation (Gregory & Kaufeldt, 2015; Souers & Hall, 2016). Teachers use these systems to further reinforce the students' academic gain through self-progress monitoring (William, 2018). The management system is used by effective teachers to track both positive progress and lack of progress toward learning standards or behavioral goals (Fisher et al., 2018).

Discipline and Consequences

According to Johnson (2013), students feel a natural and basic need to belong. When students are removed from the learning environment, their sense of belonging is adversely impacted (Johnson, 2013). Sieberer-Nagler (2016) specified that successful teachers maximize learning time by establishing appropriate student behaviors in the classroom. Appropriate behaviors reduce disruptions and increase learning time (Sieberer-Nagler, 2016).

Teachers with effective classroom management use incidences of misbehavior to teach and then reinforce appropriate behaviors (Harlacher, 2015). Johnson (2013) emphasized the need for teachers to use pre-corrective strategies to prevent behaviors and to prompt or remind students what behaviors are appropriate in a variety of settings. Gregory and Kaufeldt (2015) reminded teachers that many students will act negatively when faced with a challenge they perceive too difficult or have no interest in the task.

William (2018) suggested that teachers assess the level of difficulty frequently. As stated by William (2018), “Boredom occurs when the level of challenge is low and the level of capability is high” while anxiety occurs “when the level of challenge is high and the level of capability is low” (p. 177). Hattie and Zierer (2018) proposed high levels of student engagement despite high levels of the challenge if the task is viewed as interesting and worthwhile.

Smith and Dearborn (2016) described classroom management as a plan of prevention. The researchers further explained when attempts of prevention fail, consequences are introduced as an additional plan for intervention (Smith & Dearborn, 2016). To prevent disruptive problems or behaviors in the classroom, changes in the

environment may be required (Selfridge, 2014). Selfridge (2014) reported changes in the environment include “changing seating arrangements, offering choices, having work ready for students as soon as they enter the classroom, and providing transition warnings” (p. 9).

Rusk (2016) recommended that effective classroom management include the following: establish rules, give punishments, ignore behaviors, maintain contact with parents, facilitate motivations through activities, and establish a cause for the problem. Classroom management systems are effective when a hierarchy of management is used to manage behavior (Harlacher, 2015). Smith and Dearborn (2016) recommended consequences should be ordered in a hierarchy with the mildest consequence given first. Covey et al. (2014) detailed the most meaningful influence on behavior is the natural conscience, which provides lasting value.

Chenoweth (2017) suggested using expectations to regulate discipline so students understand what is expected in public spaces such as the hallways and lunchroom. Selfridge (2014) described that punishment can be effective in reducing behaviors when used appropriately. Chenoweth (2017) recommended employing a discipline system which is not based on punishment but is designed as a system using consequences to educate students. The discipline system should be used to teach students what is expected (Chenoweth, 2017). However, Dion (2016) reported researchers have also shown that punishment becomes ineffective without positive strategies for correction. Dion (2016) suggested that students do not follow school rules when there are punishments without rewards for positive behavior.

Johnson (2013) cautioned teachers from sending students away, excluding, or separating students from the instructional environment. Coleman (2012) conveyed the most commonly reported classroom management technique is the removal of students from the classroom. When students are removed from the classroom due to undesirable behaviors, those students miss the instructional time with the teacher (Selfridge, 2014). According to Smith and Dearborn (2016), a teacher's last resort should be an office referral because an office referral takes the student away from instructional time. Coleman (2012) stated, "Each time a student is removed from the learning environment, it results in a net loss of instructional time, which can often have academic implications" (p. 37). As noted by Johnson (2013), students perceive their learning environment as unsafe when teachers use sarcasm, criticism, or punishment. Johnson (2013) indicated the removal action prevents students from acquiring social skills. Initial changes in behavior may be experienced, but due to feelings of anger and resentment from the isolation, student behavior often reverts (Johnson, 2013).

In summary, effective teachers know when classroom behaviors are reduced, time-on-task and instructional times are increased to ensure maximum classroom time spent on learning (Sieberer-Nagler, 2016). Effective teachers use a classroom management plan which includes the implementation of consequences (Smith & Dearborn, 2016). Consequences are used to educate the students and teach them what is expected or what is appropriate as a replacement behavior (Johnson, 2013). Effective teachers understand that using consequences to encourage appropriate behavior discourages disruptive behaviors (Harlacher, 2015; Sieberer-Nagler, 2016).

Relationships and Attitudes

Marzano, Scott, Boogren, and Newcomb (2017) suggested that students have a foundational need to belong and be a part of a community. Sieberer-Nagler (2016) indicated that good teachers have the ability to develop relationships with students. These teachers care about their students, are interested in them as individuals, and are supportive (Sieberer-Nagler, 2016). Students' social, emotional, and academic outcomes are directly related to the quality of relationships with their peers and teachers (Brinkerhoff & Roehrig, 2014). As reported by Hattie and Zierer (2018), a positive teacher-student relationship at an effect size of 0.72 is essential for student success. Benson (2014) suggested when teachers take the time to build student relationships, a single conversation can set the course to the student's engagement for a lifetime.

According to Wong and Wong (2014), the most important part of being an effective teacher is to have a daily connection to show students that the teacher cares, is there for them, and wants to help them be successful. Smith and Dearborn (2016) determined that as students feel safe and become comfortable in the classroom, they become more willing to participate and are more motivated to learn. Souers and Hall (2016) emphasized the importance of building safe, sustainable relationships with all the students through consistency, trust, and support. Benson (2014) explained a teacher must not be intrusive but be available to assist the student to describe and identify a mixture of emotions. When students feel safe, comfortable, and motivated, they are less likely to act out (Smith & Dearborn, 2016).

Burgess (2012) suggested seeing students as the unique people they are. To be successful in the classroom, the teacher must know the students well and make an effort

to connect with them to build strong relationships (Souers & Hall, 2016). Marzano (2017) emphasized that teachers must make an active choice to decide to act in a positive way to establish a positive relationship even when the teacher is not motivated by re-occurring negative behaviors. Teachers must make a purposeful choice followed by specific actions to develop and maintain positive relationships with all students (Marzano, 2017). As detailed by Jennings (2015), positivity is essential because children are attracted to positive emotions naturally.

Burgess (2012) recommended interacting with the students to build rapport and treating them all as equal human beings. The factors that determine if a student will or will not obey a teacher, according to Johnson (2013), are dependent on solid relationships built over time, creating a sense of intrinsic motivation and trust between the teacher and student. Supportive teacher relationships lead students to want to learn and to be motivated because their learning is valued by the teacher (Lee, 2012).

According to Brinkerhoff and Roehrig (2014), time spent learning to respect others through talking and sharing leads to more productive time during instruction. The most important factor in student achievement is the relationship between the teacher and the student (Godwin, 2013; Hawpe, 2013). Godwin (2013) suggested that the relationship is based on the trust established through a true understanding of the student's ability. Marzano and Marzano (2015) reported students must have their needs met and feel a sense of belonging before they are able to engage in the classroom. Hattie and Zierer (2018) detailed the climate of trust as a zone of comfort where students feel they are able to ask questions, be heard, allowed to make mistakes following a challenge, and receive a resolution to the situation.

One key aspect of building relationships is to ensure a well-managed classroom where students are on-task, which allows for one-on-one time to build relationships (Wong & Wong, 2009). When teachers are able to connect with students, students are able to learn through more personalized instruction (Dion, 2016). Rusk (2016) reported that teachers must be able to understand the students' development, amount and degree of prior knowledge, academic abilities, interests, cultural influences and diversities, and individual learning preferences. The teacher is better able to understand what students can and cannot do with or without support when the teacher understands student socio-emotional and cultural factors (Dion, 2016). When teachers demonstrate a willingness to help students with both school and personal issues, this builds positive relationships and motivates the student (Lewis, 2016). Educational research has shown one critical factor in determining successful learning is a positive student-teacher relationship, which yields an effect size of 0.72 (Fisher et al., 2018; Hattie & Zierer, 2018).

Lewis (2016) suggested taking an interest in students outside of school helps to develop and build relationships, shows students the teacher is interested in them as individuals, and helps strengthen the relationship connection. Lewis (2016) detailed that respect and caring are the two teacher behaviors that positively impact the student-teacher relationship and additionally correlate with strong student achievement. Dion (2016) communicated that the respect shown by teachers to students is associated with the level of respect students display to each other. Students' perceptions of how peers and teachers feel about them affect their ability to learn in the classroom (Dion, 2016). Jennings (2015) specified a supportive teacher relationship makes a significant contribution to the success of the student.

Johnson (2013) indicated the major contributor to student success and classroom culture is relationship building. Student academic achievement is affected by the students' positive relationships with their teacher, and they are, therefore, more behaviorally and emotionally engaged (Lee, 2012). Fisher et al. (2018) suggested that positive relationships are established when the teacher purposely chooses a positive attitude towards students. As recommended by Silver (2014), teachers who employ consistent procedures for ensuring students receive positive recognition are more successful classroom managers. Dion (2016) described the relationship as "student-teacher connectedness" when detailing the importance of the relationship to social-emotional development (p. 98). Students develop a feeling of connection to their school when teachers are able to give students jobs and responsibilities to make them feel important (Rusk, 2016).

According to Caldarella, Page, and Gunter (2015), relationships are critical to behavior management and help to solve problems. Silver (2014) indicated the more time teachers invest in students, the more they know about the student, which allows for better classroom management. Teachers should start at the beginning of the school year building positive relationships with students to reduce behavioral issues (Dion, 2016). Dion (2016) detailed that students work for teachers who they feel respect them and with whom they have positive relationships. Rusk (2016) suggested building a bond through empathy with students to cultivate a relationship and to develop a connection between student and teacher. This bond leads to an understanding between the teacher and the student where the teacher knows how to relate to the student, and the student is then less likely to cause disruptions (Rusk, 2016). Hawpe (2013) stated, "Attitude is not passive,

but rather a dynamic or directive influence on behavior and that attitude directly influences behavior” (p. 52).

Bulson (2015) stated, “Teachers who focus on building relationships in their classes had fewer discipline problems” (p. 51). When students were asked about positive student-teacher relationships, they reported “viewing themselves as more engaged with the course material and activities” (Bulson, 2015, p. 51). Smith and Dearborn (2016) indicated that students are less likely to act out in class when they feel a positive connection with the teacher and the class. Lewis (2016) reported that teachers have the ability to decrease negative behavior and reduce levels of disciplinary behaviors by developing quality relationships and bonds with their students. These positive relationships will additionally create an increase in academic success and positive academic achievement (Lewis, 2016).

It is important to remember, as reported by Johnson (2013), “children truly need attention,” which at times will lead them to act out negatively to obtain adult attention (p. 20). Souers and Hall (2016) suggested being cognizant of teacher reactions to behaviors which can positively or negatively affect the relationship. Additionally, teachers need to understand a student’s thoughts and emotions to better prepare for triggers, tendencies, or patterns of actions (Souers & Hall, 2016).

In summary, the most influential factor determining student success is the direct positive relationship the teacher develops with the student (Hattie & Zierer, 2018). Effective teachers know it is essential to connect with the students daily to maintain positive relationships (Wong & Wong, 2014). Over time, solid relationships are developed when teachers treat students with dignity and respect (Burgess, 2012).

Students are more likely to be motivated to learn from a teacher who understands them and knows their personal limitations and their ability to be successful (Godwin, 2013). Teachers with strong student relationships have fewer discipline issues (Rusk, 2016). When students are able to establish strong relationships with their teachers, they are more likely to connect that relationship to a strong positive relationship with school (Rusk, 2016). Effective teachers understand the essential need to develop relationships and make additional efforts to improve and cultivate the teacher-student relationship (Souers & Hall, 2016).

Instruction

One approach to effective instruction with students is to teach them a “clearly visible set of rules, rewards, and consequences” (Coleman, 2012, p. 32). Wong and Wong (2009) emphasized that during the first week of school, it is important to establish consistency. As indicated by Brinkerhoff and Roehrig (2014), the time a teacher spends teaching, practicing, modeling, and then clarifying is valuable time gained when expectations are clearly understood. The effectiveness of instruction directly contributes to student success (Bright, 2017; Harlacher, 2015).

Marzano (2017) encouraged teachers to set clear learning goals written so that students are able to understand the progression of their learning path. When students understand the progression of learning, they are able to identify where they are within the path of knowledge and at what level they will reach mastery (Marzano, 2017). As detailed by Bloomberg and Pitchford (2017), teachers help students identify and focus on individual learning successes, so the students are then able to identify their learning

development. The process develops learning focused on student and teacher relationships (Bloomberg & Pitchford, 2017).

According to Marzano (2017), all lessons should be used to enhance the application of common knowledge. Teachers should make learning visible by accessing the students' prior knowledge and experiences (Hattie & Zierer, 2018). Using an advanced organizer to establish a connection between new and preexisting information creates an effect size of 0.41 (Hattie & Zierer, 2018). Antonetti and Garver (2015) recommended teaching learners the natural process of thinking through a situation, allowing them to develop fluency to create individual thinkers.

Effective teachers are able to adapt, implement, and problem-solve (Wong & Wong, 2009). Fisher et al. (2018) reported that learning occurs when students have relationships with teachers, and lessons are designed to engage, interest, and challenge students. Wong and Wong (2009) conveyed that effective teachers use research-based practices proven effective.

Hawpe (2013) suggested that effective teachers use a more flexible approach, not a single or one-size-fits-all approach, which allows students a more customized and individualized understanding of content. Content is presented by the teacher to students in various and different ways, which allows students to learn and engage in multiple ways (Hawpe, 2013). Gregory and Kaufeldt (2015) suggested getting student attention by “using a cartoon, picture, music, or YouTube to capture interests related to the topic” (p. 53).

Changing the order of the content by introducing the activity first increases student exploration by moving away from traditional standardized instruction (Antonetti

& Garver, 2015). Silver (2014) suggested engaging students by beginning a lesson as a hands-on activity. Gregory and Kaufeldt (2015) recommended incorporating a visual, auditory, tactile, or kinesthetic opportunity into every lesson.

Gregory and Kaufeldt (2015) added that instruction must begin with an attention grabber and then create meaningful connections with relevancy to the students' lives, or learning will not occur. Additionally, Gregory and Kaufeldt (2015) suggested that students are more likely to be motivated by a learning activity when they are able to understand that the lesson has value and relevance to their lives. Wiliam (2018) defined active learning as the construction of knowledge when students are able to connect their learning to the world around them. Learning is dependent upon the active involvement in the experience, linking familiar information to new concepts, and applying it to the world (Silver, 2014). Silver (2014) described the teachers' role transitioning from fact teller to facilitator of discovery, guiding students, and allowing for exploration.

Brinkerhoff and Roehrig (2014) suggested using a purpose statement which asks students to answer the question, "Why does this matter to me?" (p. 61). Questioning the purpose helps provide relevance and improves student learning (Brinkerhoff & Roehrig, 2014). Questioning, with an effect size of 0.48, creates opportunities for higher-order cognitive thinking and discussion, allowing the teacher to better understand the level of student learning (Hattie & Zierer, 2018). According to Hattie and Zierer (2018), the questioning process allows for increased opportunities for students to participate in the metacognitive process.

Hawpe (2013) suggested creating one curriculum flexible enough to use with all students. Marzano (2017) detailed a cycle in which students must loop through the

content, intermingling their old knowledge with their current knowledge base, and make changes to their new knowledge base. According to Wiliam (2018), determining the student's prior knowledge is the most important factor which influences learning. As cited by Benson (2014), "One of our best attributes is the ability to learn through a series of self-corrected ideas" which one develops for survival based on one's experiences (p. 80). Teachers must model the complex thought process and reasoning that occur within the thinking and reasoning process (Benson, 2014).

As reported by Wiliam (2018), students who obtained a high level of education are correlated to higher earnings with better health and an increased lifespan. According to Smith and Dearborn (2016), when educators teach behavior, they essentially teach life skills. Smith and Dearborn (2016) clarified, "Life is about making choices, experiencing consequence, and learning from one's successes and mistakes" (p. 12). All teachers and staff are responsible for identifying and rewarding positive student behavior and ensuring a safe environment where students are able to develop and learn appropriate social skills and academics (Dion, 2016). Souers and Hall (2016) reported that behaviors are manifestations of student attempts to survive, which are often observed as disruptive and inappropriate.

According to the USDOE (2008), the characteristics of the child must be considered when selecting strategies and during instruction. Teachers must find the right balance to personalize instruction based on the students' ability to understand and what they are able to do with and without support (Dion, 2016). Dion (2016) emphasized that the "socioemotional and cultural factors" of students must be understood (p. 30). Instruction, according to Brinkerhoff and Roehrig (2014), must be in response to the

individual needs of students to provide students with the knowledge of how it relates to their individual growth. Reese (2012) specified that effective teachers hold all students to equally high expectations, but treat them differently academically because the rates of learning among students differ.

Part of the natural learning process is to make errors (Sieberer-Nagler, 2016). Hattie (2012) stated, “The optimal classroom climate for learning is one that generates a climate in which it is understood that it is okay to make mistakes because mistakes are the essence of learning” (p. 26). Effective teachers, as reported by Kidwell (2015), understand their students’ abilities and are able to revise and adjust instruction through the use of strategies to ensure student learning occurs. Students expressed that the most important factor for learning is the effort of a teacher to explain a difficult concept until the student understands (Lewis, 2016).

Wong and Wong (2009) conveyed that students must, on average, have something new repeated to them eight times. Teachers who provide effective instruction break learning into steps and are then able to teach the steps and connect the steps (Smith & Dearborn, 2016). Fisher et al. (2018) described expert teachers as those who have the ability to use their understanding of the learning process to scaffold instruction into a concrete representation, which can be understood by early learners. Teachers must help develop a concrete understanding by using concrete materials and manipulatives to derive life experience before moving to abstract thinking (Gregory & Kaufeldt, 2015).

Additionally important, as indicated by Morningstar, Shogren, Lee, and Born (2015), is providing students with the occasion to engage in their learning through multiple learning opportunities. Gregory and Kaufeldt (2015) suggested all learners can

be motivated by providing them with an opportunity to look forward to being creative. Creating learning activities that require students to apply the knowledge they have acquired in unique situations increases engagement in the activity (Marzano, 2017). Students need a daily balance of whole group, small group, and independent instruction as well as time for collaborative work and assessments (Brinkerhoff & Roehrig, 2014).

According to Hattie and Zierer (2018), conducting frequent formative assessments is among the most powerful factors in successful teaching with an effect size of 0.90. Data collected from the frequent assessments are then used to modify and improve the instructional process throughout the lesson (Hattie & Zierer, 2018). Chenoweth (2017) emphasized that it is important for teachers to use frequent assessments to determine what students need to know and then use that data collected to drive future instructional planning. According to Wiliam (2018), student achievement can be substantially improved by the use of consistent classroom assessment. Evidence collected from assessments should be used to adjust instruction to meet the student learning achievements or deficiencies (Wiliam, 2018).

Harlacher (2015) explained that behaviors should be taught in the same way that academics are directly taught to students. Teachers should model behaviors for students and use misbehaviors or inappropriate behaviors as an opportunity to teach (Harlacher, 2015). Misbehaviors can be used by the teacher as opportunities to connect and communicate with the students to redirect them to the appropriate behavior (Chenoweth, 2017).

Sooter (2014) indicated that schools experience more common occurrences of appropriate behaviors when they begin to integrate the skills into the curriculum and

model appropriate behaviors in the school environment. Students need to be taught the difference between what is appropriate and what is not appropriate, ways to discipline themselves into making better choices (Smith & Dearborn, 2016), and alternative ways to meet their needs (Rusk, 2016). Souers and Hall (2016) suggested establishing healthy learning environments that identify what the student needs and promote teaching coping skills, which are less disruptive.

Johnson (2013) determined that behavioral definitions and interpretations are subjective and can be constructed differently based on what one teacher finds appropriate or inappropriate. Additionally, behavioral definitions have not been consistent throughout the literature (Giles Guest, 2015). According to Reese (2012), due to variations in students, teachers need to be more understanding and adaptive to unpredictable student behaviors and should develop strategies to meet student needs.

Dion (2016) suggested developing a prevention approach where teachers define behavior, teach behavioral expectations, and follow appropriate behaviors with rewards. The role of the teacher, as described by Harlacher (2015), is to identify and teach skills by providing instruction and guidance. Harlacher (2015) stated, “Students should receive direct instruction on how to behave, just as they receive instruction in academic content” (p. 23).

To improve student behavior, Selfridge (2014) suggested behavioral interventions that include teaching appropriate or alternative behaviors. Reinke et al. (2014) noted that highly effective strategies include pre-corrective statements and praise to acknowledge and remind students of appropriate behavior. In addition, Rusk (2016) indicated that teachers must use verbal praise and individual attention to reinforce appropriate

behaviors, maintain control over disruptive students, and encourage students to follow classroom rules. Schools that provide positive behavior supports clearly define and teach behavioral expectations, provide consistent responses, and develop a system focused on increasing positive behaviors based on behavior-specific data (Sooter, 2014). Selfridge (2014) described a proactive school as one that implements positive behavior supports which are “data driven and deliver research-based interventions in response to that data” (p. 8).

According to Johnson (2013), cycles of student misbehavior can be caused by a teacher’s behavior. It is the role of the teacher to continually interact with students to understand and resolve behavior problems (Rusk, 2016). Wilkinson (2013) expressed that relationships between parents and teachers lead to high levels of success and improve social and educational outcomes for students, specifically those in special education programs. Silver (2014) recommended making contact with parents at the beginning of the year and continuing communicating as an influential motivator for the student.

In summary, effective teachers understand time invested in instruction of classroom expectations directly correlates to student and classroom success (Brinkerhoff & Roehrig, 2014). Effective teachers are flexible and strategically design instructional lessons to incorporate multiple modes of delivery to include a multi-sensory approach used to engage the learner into the lesson (Fisher et al., 2018). Following the development of strong teacher-student relationships, teachers are able to create and implement more tailored and individualized lesson content (Hawpe, 2013). Effective teachers are able to design instructional content, which motivates students into becoming

active participants because students are able to connect with the content and apply it to their lives (Gregory & Kaufeldt, 2015).

Procedures and Expectations

Wong et al. (2014) supported Kounin's theory when summarizing classroom management. Wong and Wong (2009) summarized Kounin by affirming that a classroom that maximizes instructional time, reduces misbehaviors, and increases student engagement is based on what the teacher does, not what the student does. Successful teachers are able to maximize teacher and student time spent on learning by establishing appropriate student behavior (Sieberer-Nagler, 2016). Hattie and Zierer (2018) emphasized the importance of teacher lead time on task to ensure a smooth learning experience.

As communicated by Selfridge (2014), proactive strategies are implemented before the behavior occurs to reduce the probability that the behavior will occur in the future. Brinkerhoff and Roehrig (2014) emphasized the importance of explicitly teaching self-regulating behaviors by teaching, modeling, and practicing the strategies and the procedures for each process. According to Wong et al. (2014), "The effective teacher shares the plan with students, so they comprehend their role in the classroom management plan and can become responsible for carrying out the plan" (p. 16).

As stated by Sieberer-Nagler (2016), "almost all behavior is learned," and learning invokes changes in behavior, which alters consequences and further influences behaviors in the classroom (p. 164). Effective teachers, as described by Wong and Wong (2009), teach students to be in control of their own actions within the first two weeks of

school. Lee (2012) conveyed that children who are adequately able to participate in society have been taught socially desirable behaviors and rules.

Researchers and educators agree that clearly defined rules and consequences are primarily the responsibility of the teacher and reduce student misbehavior (Johnson, 2013; Mika, 2015; Reese, 2012; Rusk, 2016). Mika (2015) specified that when time is devoted to discipline, instructional time is reduced and not committed to academic instruction. The commitment of classroom time not spent on instructional time reduces the opportunity to learn (Mika, 2015). Johnson (2013) stated, “It is much easier and less stressful to prevent behavioral problems than deal with them after they occur” (p. 31).

End-of-the-year student achievement, as outlined by Wong and Wong (2009), is directly related to the teacher establishing classroom procedures in the first week of class and maintaining control. Marzano (2017) suggested that rules and procedures are typically taught at the beginning of the year, and then adaptations to the rules and procedures are made throughout the year. Teachers manage classrooms effectively by organizing and communicating rules and procedures (Reese, 2012).

Academic time, according to Harlacher (2015), is maximized in classrooms with clear procedures. Wong et al. (2014) specified that explicit procedures need to be taught and should explain how things are to be done within the classroom. As detailed by Bloomberg and Pitchford (2017), students are able to function as independent learners when routines and procedures are established in the classroom, are taught, and are modeled by the teacher. Environments should be defined in terms of what students can do, what they cannot do, and what exactly constitutes rights and wrongs (Sieberer-Nagler, 2016). Consistency is created in the classroom, according to Wong et al. (2014),

when students know what to expect from classroom procedures and how to perform those procedures.

When teachers communicate and set high expectations, students perform better than students with teachers who set low expectations (Wong & Wong, 2009). As cited by Jennings (2015), students are more likely to perceive themselves as successful when the teacher expects success through support and motivation. Fisher et al. (2018) reported that teachers must develop and hold high expectations. Wong and Wong (2009) stated, “Students tend to learn as little or as much as their teacher expects” (p. 42).

In agreement, Hattie and Zierer (2018) reported setting appropriately high expectations for students will ensure higher outcomes. According to Gable, Tonelson, Sheth, Wilson, and Park (2012), both special education and general education teachers agree the most important management practice is the use of clear rules and expectations in the classroom. As summarized by Wong and Wong (2009), teacher expectations are ultimately what influence student achievement, student lives, and student success in the world.

Teacher expectations result in an effect size of 0.43; when students are aware of the high expectations of the teacher, they will perform accordingly (Hattie & Zierer, 2018). Lewis (2016) reported that the characteristics of an effective teacher include setting high expectations for student success in academics and behaviors, while also providing the tools to be successful. Developing and setting classroom environmental norms creates expectations for academic excellence and behavior while imposing consensus from students and teachers where individuals do not deviate from the expectations (Lee, 2012).

Successful teachers move learners from one learning task to another with few interruptions, and increase student achievement, with an effect size of 0.38 (Hattie & Zierer, 2018). As explained by Benson (2014), schools must annually review certain rules and consequences. Established rules and consequences used as reasonable guidelines positively impact a school's culture (Benson, 2014).

In summary, establishing clear expectations allows the teacher to maximize instructional time while additionally ensuring appropriate classroom behaviors (Sieberer-Nagler, 2016; Wong & Wong, 2009). Effective teachers employ these strategies as preemptive techniques through a classroom management plan (Selfridge, 2014). Management plans enable students to understand what is expected and perform within appropriate expectations set by the teacher (Brinkerhoff & Roehrig, 2014). Teachers who clearly express their expectations for learning and behavior give students a clear understanding of how to adjust themselves to achieve successful academic and behavioral outcomes (Brinkerhoff & Roehrig, 2014). Effective teachers additionally continually provide tools to the students through the use of redirection and verbal reinforcements to perform in accordance with the expectations to ensure success (Lewis, 2016; Reese, 2012).

Engagement and Motivation

According to Lewis (2016), student engagement in the learning process is the best indicator of academic growth. Marzano (2017) defined engagement as occurring when students are paying attention, intrigued, energized, and inspired. Student academic growth can also be predicted by the quality of student-teacher interactions and the level of engagement (Lewis, 2016). Students demonstrate higher levels of academic

performance when engaged in their school work (Corso, Bundick, Quagua, & Haywood, 2013). Fisher et al. (2018) conveyed that students who are not engaged are less likely to pay attention and are less likely to learn. Lee (2012) suggested that a positive correlation between academic achievement and student engagement can be found despite socio-economic status, gender, or race. Motivation, with an effect size of 0.48, is an essential component to ensure students partake in the learning process (Hattie & Zierer, 2018).

Burgess (2012) declared, “Light yourself on fire with enthusiasm and people will come from miles around just to watch you burn” (p. 12). It can be an unforgettable experience, as indicated by Burgess (2012), to have the opportunity to interact with someone who is filled with passion and is totally engaged. Sieberer-Nagler (2016) described effective teachers as educators who established positive learning environments, convey enthusiasm, are passionate about the subject, use student names, reinforce participation in class, and move among the students actively. Gregory and Kaufeldt (2015) stated, “You cannot expect students to be interested, curious, and excited about learning when the teacher is not” (p. 145).

The individual wellbeing of students has been directly correlated with increasing levels of student engagement (Corso et al., 2013). Corso et al. (2013) expressed that students who are more highly engaged feel better about themselves, feel better cognitively and emotionally, are more satisfied in life, are engaged behaviorally, and have a better quality of work in their later lives. Student engagement and positive student-teacher relationships have been linked to a better student sense of belonging, improved interpersonal relationships, and positive self-efficacy (Dion, 2016). Dion (2016) stated, “Belongingness is related to student engagement” (p. 32).

When students feel they have a voice, they are more likely to engage and be academically motivated (Fisher et al., 2018). Marzano (2017) reported motivation occurs when students realize they are connected and part of something greater than self. According to Brinkerhoff and Roehrig (2014), higher rates of on-task learning and task engagement are displayed in classrooms with a positive emotional climate, proactive classroom management, and high-quality student-teacher relationships.

Hattie and Zierer (2018) determined feedback was one of the most significant overall influences on student performance, with an effect size of 0.75. An important factor for maintaining student motivation is effective feedback from the teacher (Wiliam, 2018). Wiliam (2018) suggested that well-timed feedback, delayed or immediate, is essential to maintaining student motivation. Feedback should be used by teachers to provide students with information on how to improve their understanding of the content (Marzano, 2017). Feedback provides information to the learner about the processes used or needed to complete the learning task or goal (Hattie & Zierer, 2018). The teacher can ensure lesson flow using feedback by adding to or continuing the opportunities for continual interaction between the student and the content (Gregory & Kaufeldt, 2015). Wiliam (2018) emphasized the need for teachers to use feedback to support a growth mindset.

Marzano et al. (2017) communicated that all activities are opportunities wherein specific needs can be met through Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Motivation and inspiration occur at the moment learners determine the level of fulfillment and inspiration, and "each level is generally not available without filling the needs related to

the level below it” (Marzano et al., 2017, p. 3). Godwin (2013) suggested teachers use a variety of strategies and activities to motivate learners.

The extent of needs and goals achieved through the hierarchy is the extent to which students in the classroom are motivated and inspired (Marzano et al., 2017). Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are important in the educational setting (Godwin, 2013). To motivate students and build student-teacher relationships, Lewis (2016) suggested teachers need to help students with school work and with personal issues to prove they care. According to Sieberer-Nagler (2016), motivation provided by the teacher through effective feedback, constructive information, immediate and specific praise, and encouragement helps provide students with direction to choose appropriate behavior.

Lee (2012) suggested that as students progress through grades from elementary to middle school, they become less engaged in school and continue to be less engaged from middle school to high school. Students who are increasingly engaged are less likely to drop out of school (Lee, 2012). Students are more engaged in the classroom when teachers have created a safe and organized environment where teachers exhibit caring behaviors and encourage students (Lewis, 2016).

In addition, Kinnealey et al. (2012) expressed that educational or classroom environments are essential components for student success, attention, and engagement and may need modifications. Students who are actively engaged due to effective classroom management are less likely to participate in misbehavior (Harlacher, 2015). Mika (2015) conveyed that when students are more engaged in learning through teacher-

provided opportunities for task engagement, student discipline issues are less likely to occur.

According to Lee (2012), lack of engagement is important because disengaged students struggle academically, display and participate in problem behaviors, and are more likely to drop out of school. More teacher time and effort can be spent on learning when engagement is high, and less time and effort are spent on managing behavior and disciplinary issues (Corso et al., 2013). As communicated by Harlacher (2015), less time is spent engaged in inappropriate behaviors when students are more engaged in the task or content. According to Burgess (2012), “An engaged student is rarely a behavior problem, misbehavior usually indicates boredom, overwhelm, or lack of connection to the material being covered” (p. 20). Mika (2015) stated that engagement occurs when “learning is relevant, personalized, collaborative, and connected” (p. 26).

Sieberer-Nagler (2016) determined that teachers are effective when they are able to understand each student’s interests and learning styles. Rusk (2016) detailed that teachers must keep students motivated by providing a clear purpose for being in class. Throughout an entire lesson, effective teachers are able to incorporate and utilize instructional strategies to repeatedly engage students (Sieberer-Nagler, 2016). Bright (2017) explained that superior teachers use several strategies to improve instruction because students are less likely to learn when they are not engaged. The actively engaged lesson offers sufficient opportunities for students to respond (Harlacher, 2015).

Classroom energy should be focused and directed to increase engagement and student learning (Dion, 2016). Marzano (2017) stressed the importance of introducing new content using direct instruction. The instructional process, as detailed by Marzano

(2017), begins by modeling to introduce the skill, followed by describing the thinking process, and walking students through the steps which must be executed. Teachers must choose resources to keep students engaged, focused, and interested in learning (Rusk, 2016). Marzano (2017) suggested using intrigue to capture student interest and raise the level of engagement. Mika (2015) emphasized the positive relationship between academic achievement and the level of student engagement. Achievement is influenced through direct instructional strategies focused on student engagement (Mika, 2015).

In summary, the observable level of classroom engagement can be directly related to the levels of student success (Lewis, 2016). Effective teachers ensure high levels of engagement and motivation during instruction through the use of positive learning environments; they encourage participation and encourage students to be active learners (Brinkerhoff & Roehrig, 2014). An increase in student performance is apparent when students are learning in positive environments where there are noticeably strong student-teacher relationships (Dion, 2016).

Teacher Perceptions and Preparation

According to Wong and Wong (2009), the most important factor which influences children's learning is overwhelmingly shown to be teacher knowledge. However, teachers enter the first days of their profession with no experience and no training (Wong & Wong, 2009). Phillippo and Stone (2013) suggested that when the teaching profession is compared to other helping professions, teacher preparation lags behind in preparedness.

The most important part of a successful educational program is to ensure teachers are competent, knowledgeable, trained, and have the skills to work with difficult student

populations (Gable et al., 2012). Henderson (2014) cited, during their first seven years of teaching, teachers gradually improve their efficacy and instructional skills. Wong and Wong (2009) explained that effective teachers add to their knowledge by continuing to learn and use strategies and by making choices based on new knowledge.

Henderson (2014) stated that special education teachers are likely to stay in the field of special education and are more confident about their abilities when they have an adequate understanding of instructional strategies that can be used to reach all students. In summary, Henderson (2014) also indicated students experience insignificant achievement gains when their special education teacher enters the teaching field without full training and certification. Hawpe (2013) suggested teachers be trained in specific instructional strategies that can positively affect teacher behaviors and positively influence academic achievement in the classroom.

Hawpe (2013) additionally suggested many teachers report they are unprepared to teach students with disabilities. Special education teachers need to be prepared to teach students with disabilities in a variety of settings, through practical and authentic teaching experiences, using differentiated instructional practices (Henderson, 2014). Students with disabilities need teachers who are able to adapt instruction and implement accommodations; however, many teachers report they do not feel prepared and struggle to implement accommodations (Hawpe, 2013).

As described by Coleman (2012), multiple studies based on teacher reports and perceptions indicate teachers' state they are not adequately trained or feel unprepared to handle discipline within their classrooms. Jennings (2015) reported after five years, approximately 50% of teachers will leave the teaching profession. Coleman (2012)

stated, “Teacher-education programs do not give beginning teachers the practical skills they will need when they begin teaching” (p. 30). Teacher preparation programs are not preparing teachers for classroom challenges (Coleman, 2012). Additionally, teachers participating in new teacher programs do not see their classroom management preparation as practical or relevant (Coleman, 2012). Johnson (2013) reported that teachers indicate a mismatch between what they are taught in their teacher preparation programs and actual classroom settings.

It is difficult for new teachers to implement behavior plans or interventions without adequate classroom management training, which in turn can negatively affect the teachers’ confidence (Selfridge, 2014). Without classroom management skills, teachers resort to teaching the way they were taught and abandon what they have learned because they see it as ineffective (Coleman, 2012; Johnson, 2013). Johnson (2013) stated, “These teachers do not have a toolbox of strategies from which to pull,” so they have less ability and experience to appropriately deal with disrespect and defiance (p. 27).

Giles Guest (2015) suggested programs need to train teachers to identify and distinguish between genuine and false behavioral problems. Programs should additionally prepare and train teachers to be able to teach students in areas of inadequate development, including teaching social skills for both general and special education students (Gable et al., 2012). Training is needed to develop a stronger foundation in classroom management for all teachers, at all grade levels, and with all experience levels (Johnson, 2013).

One attribute of an effective school and district is training for newly hired teachers (Wong & Wong, 2009). According to Lewis (2016), if teachers and

administrators want to enhance student achievement, they must better understand the positive effects of the teacher-student relationship. Professional development needs to focus on student success through caring and trusting collaborations to develop teacher-student relationships and teacher-parent relationships (Lewis, 2016). Phillippo and Stone (2013) suggested that many teacher preparation programs do not prepare teachers for building and maintaining positive teacher-student relationships; however, many teachers are able to develop these relationships independently. There is little to no training during teacher preparation programs focused on building relationships with students and families (Wilkinson, 2013).

The most important characteristic of teachers is their ability to teach all students at all ability levels, to hold students to high expectations, and to create a positive environment with good relationships (Lewis, 2016). Phillippo and Stone (2013) suggested teachers' abilities are largely shaped around the beliefs of their capabilities. According to Bloomberg and Pitchford (2017), teachers' self-efficacy, or the confidence they have in their abilities, has a significant correlation to student success. As stated by Dion (2016), "Differences in the level of training among new and experienced teachers can result in considerable differences in teacher perceptions" (p. 34). Harlacher (2015) theorized that teachers are less likely to remain in the profession when they lack the necessary skills to implement effective classroom management.

In summary, preparation programs have limited requirements which provide applicable teaching experience when compared to other professions (Phillippo & Stone, 2013). Many new teachers report they lack applicable authentic teaching experience to be able to effectively be prepared for their classrooms (Colman, 2012; Wong & Wong,

2009). Teacher preparatory programs need to provide adequate learning experiences and instruction to match the essential needs of current classrooms (Colman, 2012; Johnson, 2013).

Summary

Bouer (2013) suggested educational programs developed by teachers and administrators must meet the needs of all students and allow them to participate in general education. Students with disabilities are able to perform better both academically and socially when educated in the regular education inclusive environment (Hawpe, 2013). Wong and Wong (2009) specified that effective teachers use appropriate research-based-strategies from their fund of knowledge.

The foundation of student academic success is effective classroom management (Harlacher, 2015). Effective teachers are able to create a learning environment with a classroom management plan that allows instruction and learning to occur (Wong & Wong, 2009; Wong et al., 2014). Students with disabilities can be successful in a variety of educational environments or placements with supports (Bouer, 2013; Hawpe, 2013).

Chapter Three includes the methodology for the research study. Statistical data show the number of students identified with an IDEA disability continues to increase (NCES, 2017). According to the CPIR (2017), students with disabilities must be educated in the LRE alongside their regular education peers to the maximum extent possible. The purpose of this study was to identify specific best-practice strategies used by exemplary special education teachers to effectively instruct and manage the behavior of students with disabilities. A qualitative phenomenological research method was selected to provide a better understanding of the central phenomenon as experienced and

understood through the point of view of the participants (Creswell 2014b; Seidman, 2013). Participants were randomly selected from the CEC's (2017) Clarissa Hug Teacher of the Year award recipients within the past 10 years, and an interview was conducted with each participant. Interview data were coded, and then codes were developed into themes.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The number of students identified with disabilities and participating in regular education classrooms continues to increase (NCER, 2017). When provided supports, students with disabilities are able to participate in a variety of educational settings (Hawpe, 2013). According to Marzano and Marzano (2015), when teachers employ certain strategies in the classroom, substantial positive effects are observed.

Seven interviews with Clarissa Hug Teacher of the Year Award recipients were conducted. These individuals were considered exemplary in the field of special education by the CEC. This qualitative study included an analysis of the perceptions of these recognized exemplary special education teachers in relation to their best-practice knowledge in the area of instruction and behavior management practices of students with disabilities. The interviews were used to provide insight and understanding through the analysis of interview data provided by the participants. This chapter includes a discussion of the problem and an outline of the methodology of the research.

Problem and Purpose

The purpose of this study was to identify specific best-practice strategies special and regular education teachers have used to effectively instruct and manage the behavior of students with disabilities in a variety of classroom placements. The information identified through this study may assist in ensuring students with disabilities participate successfully in both special and regular education placements. The identification of specific strategies teachers can implement in their classroom management plans is revealed to assist students with disabilities in regular education placements.

This study was designed to add to the existing research by identifying the specific strategies exemplary special education teachers perceive and report to be effective when instructing and managing the behavior of students with disabilities in a variety of classroom placements. According to the NCES (2017), statistical data showed an increase in the number of students with disabilities who participate in regular education placements. As required through the IDEA and the concept of FAPE, students with disabilities are ensured an education in the least restrictive environment to the maximum extent appropriate with their non-disabled peers (USDOE, 2017a, 2017b).

According to Hawpe (2013), if an environment provides students with disabilities the support they need, the students can be successful in a variety of educational placements. This is an important factor for all involved with the ultimate goal for students with disabilities to achieve their academic potential (Baker, 2016). Marzano and Marzano (2015) noted that substantial positive effects are observed when teachers engage in specific strategies. According to Harlacher (2015), academic success is founded on effective classroom management. Bouer (2013) suggested the potential behavioral and social benefits of special education students' placement within regular education are as valuable as academic achievement.

Research questions. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What strategies do exemplary special education teachers use to instruct special education students?
2. What strategies do exemplary special education teachers use to manage behavior of special education students?

3. What types of professional learning have contributed to exemplary special education teachers' best-practices for instructing and managing behavior?

Research Design

A qualitative research approach was chosen due to the flexibility of the structure and the ability to identify and analyze general codes and themes in the data to better understand a central phenomenon and explore the varied perspectives of participants (Creswell, 2014b). Seidman (2013) detailed that a researcher must ask participants to reconstruct experiences, explore meanings, and seek what emerges from the text. Qualitative researchers analyzed the text data to infer meaning, which “involves collecting data from people, about people” (Creswell, 2014b, p. 92).

This study involved purposeful sampling to ensure the best possible participants to help the researcher better understand the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2015). Phenomenological studies are used as an investigation into a number of individuals who have all experienced a particular or central phenomenon, and their reactions or perceptions are based on the phenomenon to help the researcher understand what things mean to others (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2014). A phenomenological study uses interviews to better understand the participants' points of view from their experience and to make meaning of their experiences (Seidman, 2013).

Ethical Considerations

No relationships existed between the participants and the researcher. The participants were selected from the Clarissa Hug Teacher of the Year Award recipients within the past 10 years. These participants were nationally recognized by the CEC as

exemplary special education teachers. These individuals were selected through a national nomination process and were voted on by peer members of the CEC.

When conducting research, it is not possible to identify every ethical concern which may arise, and these challenges can occur at every step of the research process (Seidman, 2013). Known ethical considerations were addressed through various safeguards. All participants remained anonymous and were identified as Participant A, B, C, D, E, F, and G. Identification of participants was used based on the order of interview availability. There was no coercion due to the anonymity of the participants. All participants were informed of their rights and assured confidentiality and anonymity.

Population and Sample

The CEC (2017) is comprised of approximately 27,000 members throughout the U.S. States and Canadian Provincial Unit. The organization was founded in 1922 at Columbia University and publishes the Journal of Exceptional Children (CEC, 2017). The professional association of educators is committed to success for children and youth with exceptionalities and consists of a representative assembly, committees, and workgroups (CEC, 2017). Their mission is to provide advocacy, initiatives, publications, and professional development, ensuring the success of children with exceptionalities (CEC, 2017).

Since 1985, one teacher per year is awarded the Clarissa Hug Teacher of the Year award, and the award recipients are recognized through an initial nomination, must meet all eligibility requirements, and provide all required materials to the committee (CEC, 2017). The Teacher of the Year Award recipient represents the organization throughout

the award year as a spokesperson and is featured in publications during the year (CEC, 2017).

All participants selected to participate in this study have provided exemplary service in the field of special education and have been recognized by the CEC as Clarissa Hug Teacher of the Year Award recipients. The CEC award recipients participating in this study provided direct services to students with exceptionalities. All participants in this study were recognized as individuals who provided significant contributions to the field of special education. Each participant was considered to have displayed exemplary educational quality as evidenced by educational outcomes for students.

Seidman (2013) stated that researchers carefully select participants to seek an understanding of perspectives based on experience and the meaning the participants provide. The CEC (2017) recognizes these individuals as professionals whose work exemplifies and represents the highest standard of educational quality. Researchers seek to identify, understand, and describe basic human commonalities of perceptions and interpretations during similar experiences (Fraenkel et al., 2014).

The participants of this research study included seven recipients of the Clarissa Hug Teacher of the Year Award within the last 10 years. Creswell (2015) described a point during the data collection when no additional information will substantially add to the data previously collected. A sample size of seven was used to ensure the ability of the researcher to analyze interview data. Creswell (2015) suggested high-quality interview data require complex analysis to accurately reflect the views of the participants.

Participant A (PA) has dedicated 23 years of service to the field of education and has obtained the educational degree of doctorate. Throughout her educational career, PA

has provided colleagues with onsite teacher trainings, intensive professional development workshops, national lecture series, and university level course instruction. Participant A has worked as a volunteer internationally to support teachers and students abroad and has collaborated with professionals across the United States and internationally through professional leadership positions and award recognitions. Participant A has provided guidance and support for teachers through focused professional development in the areas of social and emotional skill development. Participant A emphasized the importance of an effective behavior management plan which supports the student's social and emotional needs. She has provided services to children with autism and their families through evaluation, intervention, and instruction.

Participant B (PB) has committed 20 years of service to the field of education and has obtained two master's degrees in education and technology. She attributes student success to collaboration with other educators, families, and creating connections to student's everyday lives. Participant B has provided professional development locally through workshops, conferences, and as a professional consultant. Participant B presented at national conventions on a variety of technology and special education-related topics and has served in several leadership roles. She has advocated for special education in Washington D.C. and with the U.S. Department of Education and emphasized the importance of continual discussion for change and awareness surrounding legislation. Participant B is additionally an active volunteer for several organizations.

Participant C (PC) has devoted 15 years of service to the field of education. She has worked directly with children with developmental delays and their families.

Participant C worked collectively with parents to implement a creative learning style focusing on the parent-teacher relationship in an effort to support, instruct, and empower parents. Participant C instructed at the college level and has provided instruction at the state and national level through coaching, training, and presentations in child development, focusing on working with children with developmental delays and their families. She serves the field of special education through supporting and advocating for children with exceptionalities.

Participant D (PD) has contributed 16 years of service to the field of special education while obtaining a master's degree. Using a multifaceted approach, she has focused on preparing students for life by bringing the world to the student. Participant D has collaborated with parents, colleagues, and businesses within the community to provide real-life learning experiences for students. She has served as an educational advocate and spokesperson at the state and national level to support special education and raise awareness. Participant D emphasized the importance of lifetime learning and has provided professional development through classes, coaching, and training and has additionally authored and participated in numerous publications.

Participant E (PE) used collaboration and connectivity projects to teach students with intellectual disabilities. He has contributed 21 years of service to the field of education and obtained a doctoral degree. Participant E has participated and presented internationally in publications, performances, summits, and conferences. One of the factors contributing to his success around the nation and internationally was the incorporation of high levels of technology use within the classroom. Participant E has

represented children with exceptionalities as a spokesperson to congress to raise awareness for special education.

Participant F (PF) has attributed student success to a unique understanding of parents and students with exceptionalities. Participant F reported 25 years of experience in working with students with exceptionalities and has obtained the educational level of doctorate. She implemented a program that encourages students and teachers to collaborate pre-k through grade 12. The program allows students of all ages and disabilities to work together to achieve student success. She has partnered with a variety of professionals within the educational system and community to ensure success in all areas, specifically focusing on areas related to the student's goals and objectives. Her program partnered with parents and families to encourage parent engagement.

Participant F attributed student success to high levels of expectations for each student and the personal understanding of the learning process. Participant F has advocated for special education and funding in Washington D.C. and has provided guidance and support to an international classroom.

Participant G (PG) has devoted 38 years of service to the field of education. She reported a unique environment focused on the needs of each student. Participant G has implemented a supportive environment with consistently positive feedback. She has provided a variety of learning opportunities for students employed through routine and structure. She additionally created opportunities for students to engage in the classroom as both the learner and the leader. Participant G has provided instruction at the college level for nine years as well as served on the district's leadership team within the district.

Shown in Table 1 is a summary of the number of years of experience each participant has completed. Overall, each participant reported 15 or more years of experience in working with children. All seven participants attributed personal experience as the major factor contributing to their success in working with children with exceptionalities.

Table 1

Number of Years of Experience Reported by Participants

| Participant | Years of Experience |
|-------------|---------------------|
| PA | 23 |
| PB | 20 |
| PC | 15 |
| PD | 16 |
| PE | 21 |
| PF | 25 |
| PG | 38 |

Note. The number of years of experience was reported by the seven individual participants. Years of experience include total years working with children. Participants were identified as Participant A (PA), Participant B (PB), Participant C (PC), Participant D (PD), Participant E (PE), Participant F (PF), and Participant G (PG).

Instrumentation

For the purpose of this study, seven open-ended interview questions were developed by the researcher to address the three research questions (see Appendix A). Open-ended questions were used to elicit participant responses and to allow the

participants to provide information without restraint (Creswell, 2015). The interview questions were derived from the research questions in this study. Qualitative research questions were used to analyze the text data to infer meaning (Creswell, 2014b, 2015).

Interview question one was designed to identify specific strategies teachers use to produce positive academic gains and to determine what professional learning contributed to their knowledge. Wong and Wong (2009) outlined that effective teachers communicate to students what they will learn and accomplish and are able to design effective lessons. Effective teachers explain to students why and what they are learning every day in class through clearly posted objectives (Wong & Wong, 2009).

The interview question was also designed to identify specific strategies used by teachers to encourage appropriate behavior and manage misbehavior and to determine what professional learning contributed to their knowledge. According to Wong and Wong (2009), the most important factor in student learning is the effectiveness of the teacher's classroom management plan. A classroom with set procedures and routines has minimal student misbehavior and maximizes student learning (Wong & Wong, 2009).

Interview question two was designed to identify when and how teachers communicate high positive expectations for academic achievement and appropriate behavior and to determine what professional learning contributed to their knowledge. According to Wong et al. (2014), high rates of academic success are achieved by teachers who establish and support high positive expectations. Wong and Wong (2009) stated, "Teachers who set and communicate high expectations to all their students obtain greater academic performance from students than teachers who set low expectations" (p. 42).

Wong and Wong (2009) noted, “When significant people use significant words and actions they increase the likelihood of eliciting positive behaviors from other people” (p. 75). According to Wong et al. (2014), when effective teachers communicate and talk specifically about a task or an action, they encourage appropriate behavior. Modeling and demonstrating appropriate behaviors provide an example of what is desirable and what is undesirable (Wong et al., 2014).

Interview question three was designed to identify how and why teachers create a positive classroom climate and environment. Wong et al. (2014) reported that positive interactions with students through greetings and kind words help teachers connect with students and show students that the teacher cares. According to Wong et al. (2014), “The most important aspect of being an effective and successful teacher is with daily connections that show the student you can help them learn and succeed” (p. 56). The classroom environment should show students they are safe, welcome, and wanted (Wong & Wong, 2009). Wong and Wong (2009) further explained, “If the students feel more wanted, they will be more likely to accede to your directions and requests” (p. 114).

Interview question four was designed to identify the importance of the student-teacher relationship and the attitude of the teacher. It additionally allows for the identification of how and why teachers develop these relationships. According to Wong and Wong (2009), trusting relationships are created in an effectively run classroom. Wong and Wong (2009) stated, “The effective teacher is deliberately inviting” (p. 60).

Interview question five was designed to identify how teachers keep students motivated and engaged. According to Wong et al. (2014), the proactive teacher creates an environment where students feel comfortable participating in discussions and where

they are encouraged to share perspectives and listen to others. Effective teachers model communication and listening skills (Wong et al., 2014). A proactive teacher encourages engagement through the implementation of techniques to elicit student responses and participation (Wong et al., 2014).

Interview question six was designed to identify how classroom procedures or routines can be used to maximize instructional time while minimizing student misbehavior. According to Wong and Wong (2009), well-managed classrooms reduce confusion and are often based upon a well-implemented classroom management plan introduced during the first days of school. Wong et al. (2014) reported that effective teachers teach procedures by explaining and modeling, rehearsing and practicing, and encouraging and reinforcing the procedures. Established procedures become routines automatically followed by the students without prompting (Wong et al., 2014). As reported by Wong et al. (2014), routines provide structure at the beginning of class and prepare students for the rest of the school day.

Interview question seven was designed to identify what and why a variety of classroom incentives, rewards, reinforcements, consequences, and discipline plans are used in the classroom. Wong and Wong (2009) expressed, “The teacher does not give rewards; the students earn rewards” (p. 157). According to Wong and Wong (2009), teachers provide incentives, rewards, or reinforcements to teach students self-discipline. These strategies provide opportunities for students to problem-solve and self-reflect (Wong & Wong, 2009). Wong and Wong (2009) reported that teachers must teach students how to solve a problem using cause-effect and logic. According to Wong and Wong (2009), discipline plans allow students to be responsible for their own behavior.

Data Collection

Individual recipient names and award years were provided by the CEC (2017). Participants were researched and informally contacted through email. Following approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Lindenwood University (see Appendix B), official participant recruitment began. An initial recruitment email was sent to each potential participant as an invitation to participate in the research study. Participants were informed they had been selected due to their award recognition as a Clarissa Hug Teacher of the Year (see Appendix C). Secondary contact provided the participants' basic study information and determined potential interview participation. Participants were informed that their agreement and participation in the interview served as their consent to participate in the study (see Appendix D).

Participants were purposefully selected to ensure the sample was suited best for the intent of the study (Fraenkel et al., 2014) and to help the researcher better understand the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2015). Fraenkel et al. (2014) described purposeful sampling as a researcher's way of selecting a sample of individuals who "based on prior information, will provide the data they need" (p. 100). The researcher recorded the interviews digitally to ensure accuracy during transcription, and informal interview notes were taken by the researcher. Fraenkel et al. (2014) reported that a recording device is an indispensable part of a qualitative researcher's equipment because the interviewee's word must be exactly recorded. All interview records were transcribed, and information and digital recordings were password-protected on a hard drive.

Data Analysis

The first step of data analysis for this study was collecting data through interviews with study participants. Qualitative research strategies were used to segment data, interpret the meaning of the data, and develop a narrative interpretation or description of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2014b; Fraenkel et al., 2014). Creswell (2015) reported that the qualitative study involves research questions that guide the study but changes and evolves based on open-ended responses from the participants of the study.

During the second step of data analysis, all interviews were transcribed. Interview information was transcribed into text, one word at a time (Creswell, 2015). Text sections were bracketed and labeled with common codes and patterns in the margins of each transcript. The researcher read through each transcript and assigned data codes, which were composed of themes (Creswell, 2015).

Thirdly, the researcher analyzed theme data from the interview transcripts and from notes taken during the interviews. Seidman (2013) reported that themes are developed as the researcher connects patterns among the excerpts. Themes for this study were identified and analyzed for thematic connections following coding analysis (Seidman, 2013). The major themes for this study included climate and environment; incentives, rewards, and reinforcement; discipline and consequences; relationships and attitude; instruction; engagement and motivation; and perceptions of teacher preparations. Lastly, the researcher developed a narrative passage for each theme identified to convey the findings of this study (Creswell, 2014a).

Summary

This study was conducted to identify best practice strategies, reported by exemplary special education teachers as effective to use with students with disabilities in regular and special education classroom placements. In this chapter, the problem and purpose were reviewed. Research questions were restated, and ethical considerations were shared. Then, the population, sample, and instrument were detailed. Data collection procedures and data analysis processes were explained.

Chapter Four includes an analysis of the data. The participants' responses to each interview question are provided. Common themes that emerged during the interviews are displayed in tables.

Chapter Four: Analysis of Data

Background

The purpose of this study was to identify specific strategies exemplary special education teachers identified as effective when implemented with students with disabilities in a variety of educational placements. According to federal regulations, students with disabilities must be educated alongside peers without disabilities within the least restrictive environment to the maximum extent appropriate (USDOE, 2010). The data collected and analyzed in this study may identify applicable strategies that could be used by regular and special education teachers to manage and instruct special education students in numerous classroom placements.

Interview questions for this qualitative study were designed to answer the research questions (Creswell, 2014b, 2015; Fraenkel et al., 2014). The CEC (2017) has recognized these individuals as Clarissa Hug Teacher of the Year Award recipients by providing students with exceptionalities the highest quality education. Interview participants were recognized as exemplary in the field of special education by the CEC (2017). The participants in this study worked with students and have documented educational success (CEC, 2017). Participant interviews were conducted to develop a summary of conclusions for each interview question.

Interview results. The qualitative interview questions were asked to the seven participants. Three participants were interviewed face-to-face in person. Three interviews were conducted by phone, and one interview through messaging. Participants are identified as PA, PB, PC, PD, PE, PF, and PG to ensure the anonymity of responses.

Interview question one. In your experience, what instructional strategies have you used to produce the greatest academic gains with special education students? What type of professional learning do you feel contributed to this?

In summarizing interview question one, several thematic commonalities between participants are displayed within Table 2. All participants recited the use of procedures or expectations within the classroom. Participant D and PF specifically identified using a visual representation for rules and expectations. Participants indicated students were most likely to produce academic gains when they have the knowledge and are aware of the expectations.

Participant A detailed communication as:

Embedded into every part of our day, in the morning, to communicate, to classroom jobs, all of it, so the immersion in communication is used as a tool to build social skills, as well as help students, become more socially confident.

All participants detailed communication as a strategy for maintaining a positive and productive learning environment. Participants A, PB, and PG indicated the need for the teacher to model the expected behaviors. Participant G suggested, using relationship builders such as greetings, high-fives, or the four h's. She specified, "Offer a hello, high-five, hug, or handshake daily."

Participants A and PE specifically reported creating planned opportunities for success within the classroom. All participants proposed instruction must be engaging and motivating to make academic gains. Most participants identified a specific engaging or motivational strategy used when planning and delivering effective instruction.

Participants A, PB, PD, and PG emphasized the importance of differentiating instruction

based on the student's needs and age-appropriate abilities. Participant E identified, "Academic gains are made when students are participating and are able to function in the classroom." Participants B, PC, PD, PE, and PG specified the use of multiple modes of instruction using a multi-sensory approach to ensure instructional engagement.

Participant A suggested:

Think outside the box by taking something and instead of saying two and two is four, now what else can we do? We are going to use manipulatives, we are going to act it out, we're going to take it to the next level.

Most participants expressed relationships and attitudes as an important factor in academic success. Participants B and PC specifically suggested creating a comfortable atmosphere with a welcoming environment. Participant B specified, "Keep them motivated, keep them engaged, and keep them moving, which keeps them interested." The use of incentives and rewards as reinforcements was suggested by PB, PD, and PE.

Participants A, PC, PD, and PF reported their knowledge in the area was gained through continual professional development throughout their careers. Participants B and PE reported their professional knowledge in the area was gained through experience. Participants A and PG identified specific sources from which their knowledge was gained to include Gardner's multiple intelligences theory and author Harry Wong.

Table 2

Interview Question One: Instructional Strategies to Produce Greatest Academic Gains

| Themes | PA | PB | PC | PD | PE | PF | PG |
|--|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Climate and Environment | | X | | | X | X | |
| Procedures and Expectations | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Incentives, Rewards, and Reinforcement | | X | | X | X | | |
| Discipline and Consequences | | | | | | | |
| Relationships and Attitude | | | X | X | X | | X |
| Instruction | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Engagement and Motivation | | X | | X | X | | X |

Note. Themes directly identified by participants derived from the original transcript. Participant A (PA), Participant B (PB), Participant C (PC), Participant D (PD), Participant E (PE), Participant F (PF), and Participant G (PG).

Interview question two. In your experience, when and how do you communicate and set high positive expectations for academic achievement and appropriate behavior? What type of professional learning do you feel contributed to this?

In summarizing interview question two, several thematic commonalities between participants are displayed within Table 3. All participants identified instruction as an important factor attributed to academic achievement. Participants A, PB, and PE specifically stated that the curriculum was designed to incorporate motivation and engagement into each lesson. Participant G reported the teacher and others within the classroom intentionally delivered positive comments to students. Participants A, PB, PC, PD, PF, and PG indicated that students must know the teacher has expectations that have been taught, modeled, and practiced. Participant D specified, “I use a lot of charts,

visuals, and manipulative supports.” Participants A, PC, PD, PF, and PG reported the use of a classroom schedule to reduce disruptions.

Most participants indicated procedures and expectations as an important factor for ensuring appropriate behavior in the classroom. Participant B explained expectations vary from year to year depending on the class and stated, “I always expect the best from my students, letting them know that no one is perfect and they are going to make mistakes and mess-up, but we do need to learn from them and move on.” Most participants emphasized the importance of developing positive relationships with students to promote trust and respect. Participants indicated a positive attitude as an important factor in developing a supportive environment. Participants A, PB, PE, PF, and PG specifically referred to focusing on a positive attitude. Most participants reported using an open communication system where trust is developed by conversations and spontaneous social interactions. In reference to interview question two, no participants reported the used of discipline and consequences.

Participants C and PD reported their professional knowledge in the area was gained through experience. Participant A attributed professional knowledge in the area to social skills training. Specific frameworks were identified by PB, PF, and PG to include brain-based learning by Marcia Tate, Dr. Jean Ayres, and Harry Wong publications.

Table 3

Interview Question Two: Communicate High Positive Expectations for Academic Achievement and Appropriate Behavior

| Themes | PA | PB | PC | PD | PE | PF | PG |
|--|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Climate and Environment | | | | | | X | |
| Procedures and Expectations | X | X | X | X | | X | X |
| Incentives, Rewards, and Reinforcement | X | X | | | | X | X |
| Discipline and Consequences | | | | | | | |
| Relationships and Attitude | | X | | X | X | X | X |
| Instruction | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Engagement and Motivation | X | X | | | X | | |

Note. Themes directly identified by participants derived from the original transcript. Participant A (PA), Participant B (PB), Participant C (PC), Participant D (PD), Participant E (PE), Participant F (PF), and Participant G (PG).

Interview question three. In your experience, how do you develop and maintain a positive learning environment and climate? What type of professional learning do you feel contributed to this?

In summarizing interview question three, several thematic commonalities between participants are displayed within Table 4. All participants indicated climate, environment, relationships and attitude, and factors that influence a positive learning environment. Most participants described their classroom environments as welcoming, positive, and upbeat. Most participants suggested using positive communication to provide direction and support.

Set procedures and expectations were recommended by PA and PF as contributing to their positive environment. Participants B and PC recommended asking students questions about their lives to show the teacher cares and to create personal connections. Most participants reported greeting students at the classroom door or purposefully prompting communication to encourage a positive climate. Participants A, PB, PD, and PG directly referred to personally being a behavior model of positivity to set an example for students. All participants suggested developing a relationship by getting to know the students and their abilities.

Participant F commented, “Teaching to the whole child, using creativity to provide opportunities to learn using the whole body” is an effective method. Participants A, PB, PD, PE, PF, and PG reported instruction specifically designed to include lessons which used the whole body, movement, multi-sensory, or hands-on opportunities. Participant D asserted it is pivotal to “give them a chance to introduce and contribute their own ideas of the course.” In relation to instruction, PE and PF suggested keeping the instructional environment highly engaging. Participant B and PG recommended keeping students motivated through the use of incentives and rewards. All participants reported professional knowledge in the area was gained through experience.

Table 4

Interview Question Three: Develop and Maintain Positive Learning Environment and Climate

| Themes | PA | PB | PC | PD | PE | PF | PG |
|--|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Climate and Environment | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Procedures and Expectations | X | | | | | X | |
| Incentives, Rewards, and Reinforcement | | X | | | | | X |
| Discipline and Consequences | | X | | | | | |
| Relationships and Attitude | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Instruction | X | X | | X | X | X | X |
| Engagement and Motivation | | | | | X | X | |

Note. Themes directly identified by participants derived from the original transcript. Participant A (PA), Participant B (PB), Participant C (PC), Participant D (PD), Participant E (PE), Participant F (PF), and Participant G (PG).

Interview question four. In your experience, what strategies do you use to develop relationships and maintain a positive attitude to ensure the academic and behavioral success of your students? What type of professional learning do you feel contributed to this?

In summarizing interview question four, several thematic commonalities between participants are displayed within Table 5. All participants indicated relationships and attitude as a contributing factor in developing relationships and fostering positive attitudes. Participant C stated, “The most important thing a teacher can do before learning can happen is to have a relationship; relationships are fundamental to learning.”

All participants attributed their positive attitudes as directly affecting students' attitudes. The participants described their attitudes as positive.

Most participants reported beginning the class with positive greetings and positive comments, using adult modeling. Participants recounted their positive attitudes created authentic student-teacher relationships. All participants reported positive student-teacher relationships as a critical component for behavior and academic success. Participant D detailed, "Learning is not possible without having some level of a relationship or trust with the person we are interacting with." Furthermore, most participants also suggested developing relationships with the student's families and frequently communicating with the family. Most participants reported using positive relationships with parents as a motivator for students.

Additionally, most participants identified the positive climate and environment as an essential factor for developing and maintaining a positive classroom attitude. Participants A, PC, PD, PE, PF, and PD identified specific environmental attributes that positively affect the classroom climate and environment. Most participants detailed developing classroom environments where students were reinforced using an incentive or a reward for positive behaviors or attitudes. Reinforcers were described by most participants as either verbal or tangible. Participant B suggested students often become motivated for a specific individual when they understand they are working together to become successful. Professional knowledge in the area was reportedly gained through experience by all participants.

Table 5

Interview Question Four: Strategies to Develop Relationships and Maintain Positive Attitude

| Themes | PA | PB | PC | PD | PE | PF | PG |
|--|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Climate and Environment | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Procedures and Expectations | | X | | | | X | |
| Incentives, Rewards, and Reinforcement | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Discipline and Consequences | | | | | | | |
| Relationships and Attitude | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Instruction | X | X | | | X | | |
| Engagement and Motivation | | | | X | X | | |

Note. Themes directly identified by participants derived from the original transcript. Participant A (PA), Participant B (PB), Participant C (PC), Participant D (PD), Participant E (PE), Participant F (PF), and Participant G (PG).

Interview question five. In your experience, what strategies help contribute to high levels of student engagement and motivation? What type of professional learning do you feel contributed to this?

In regard to interview question five, several thematic commonalities between participants are displayed within Table 6. Participants explicitly identified instruction as well as relationships and attitude as major contributing factors for ensuring high levels of engagement and motivation. Participant A specifically stated, “Catch those teachable moments and expand on them.” Participants A, PB, and PE recommended teachers allow students to dictate the lesson flow and adjust to ensure intentional engagement.

Participant F stated, “A teacher must allow themselves to get silly with the students as needed for engagement.”

Participants A and PD suggested using movement to keep students engaged and active within the lesson. Participant D stated, “Understand curiosity and use it to attract students to a task or assignment by making it something they have to physically do.”

Participants C and PE proposed intentionally planning the use of real-world examples guarantee instructional engagement.

All participants detailed using differentiated instruction or scaffolding to meet the individual needs of each student. Most participants specifically described their instruction or lesson plans as purposefully engaging to encourage and assure student motivation. Most participants indicated when teachers use multiple modes of instructional deliveries students are able to obtain or reach a high level of learning and therefore are more successful within the lesson.

Some participants reported the use of a reward system. In relation to this question, PC, PD, and PG described the use of a tangible reward system to increase motivation. Participants C and PF suggested the use of verbal reinforcements to warrant motivation.

Most participants identified experience as the essential factor which has contributed to their professional knowledge in the area. One participant suggested knowledge derived from continual professional development. Participants A and PD identified a specific theory or framework from which their professional knowledge was gained.

Table 6

Interview Question Five: Strategies Help Contribute to High Levels of Student Engagement and Motivation

| Themes | PA | PB | PC | PD | PE | PF | PG |
|--|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Climate and Environment | | | X | | X | | |
| Procedures and Expectations | | | | | | | |
| Incentives, Rewards, and Reinforcement | | | X | X | | | X |
| Discipline and Consequences | | | | | | | |
| Relationships and Attitude | | X | X | X | X | X | |
| Instruction | X | X | X | X | X | | X |
| Engagement and Motivation | X | X | | X | X | | X |

Note. Themes directly identified by participants derived from the original transcript. Participant A (PA), Participant B (PB), Participant C (PC), Participant D (PD), Participant E (PE), Participant F (PF), and Participant G (PG).

Interview question six. What specific procedures or routines do you use to maximize instructional time and minimize student misbehavior? When and how do you teach these? What type of professional learning do you feel contributed to this?

In regard to interview question six, several thematic commonalities between participants are displayed within Table 7. All participants indicated a reduction of student misbehavior when students were aware of the expectations for the classroom and the teacher. Participant C communicated that expectations must, “be something that can be broken down into explicit directions by teaching what it is, what it looks like, and what it feels like so the expectation can be met at some point.” All participants reported expectations were directly expressed to students. All participants reported students had

received instruction on specific procedures or routines which had been additionally practiced and reinforced.

Participant A suggested, “Move them around and keep them excited to learn so that they are not bored.” Most participants reported ensuring their instruction includes multiple modes of delivery and activities to keep students engaged. All participants suggested keeping students actively engaged within each lesson to ensure all instructional time is used, which additionally reduces student behavior.

Participants B, PE, and PF reported professional knowledge was gained through experience. Participants A and PC specifically identified trainings, which contributed to their knowledge in the area. The framework of Dr. Phyllis Jones was identified by PD.

Table 7

Interview Question Six: Procedures or Routines to Maximize Instructional Time and Minimize Student Misbehavior

| Themes | PA | PB | PC | PD | PE | PF | PG |
|--|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Climate and Environment | | X | | | X | X | |
| Procedures and Expectations | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Incentives, Rewards, and Reinforcement | X | | X | X | | | |
| Discipline and Consequences | | | X | | | | |
| Relationships and Attitude | | | | | X | | X |
| Instruction | X | X | X | X | X | X | |
| Engagement and Motivation | X | | | | X | | X |

Note. Themes directly identified by participants derived from the original transcript. Participant A (PA), Participant B (PB), Participant C (PC), Participant D (PD), Participant E (PE), Participant F (PF), and Participant G (PG).

Interview question seven. In your experience, how do you use incentives, rewards, and reinforcements or discipline and consequences? What type of professional learning do you feel contributed to this?

In regard to interview question seven, several thematic commonalities between participants are displayed within Table 8. All participants directly referred to using some form of reinforcements to include both verbal and tangible reinforcers. Participant C suggested giving the student enough positive reinforcement so the student knows that when they continue to do what is expected, there will be a positive result. All participants indicated the use of verbal reinforcers to direct, re-direct, or recognize the student's behavior.

Participant F described using the "first and then" system where students work and then are rewarded with a preferred activity. She reported, "The system teaches students to work because they are expected to, but after work, there is a reward, creating an intrinsic motivation." Most participants reported the use of tangible rewards and incentives to promote positive behaviors within the classroom.

When participants spoke in reference to behavior, some participants reported the purposeful use of natural consequences. Participants A, PB, PC, PD, and PE reported using a system to ensure a positive or negative consequence following appropriate behaviors. Participant C stated, "Those little things become very reinforcing for both positive behaviors as well as for negative behaviors that you want to reduce." Participants A, PB, PD, and PF also implied these strategies help develop incentive and motivation to keep students engaged and on-task. Overall, participants encouraged the use of incentives, rewards, and reinforcements.

Table 8

Interview Question Seven: Incentives, Rewards, and Reinforcements or Discipline and Consequence

| Themes | PA | PB | PC | PD | PE | PF | PG |
|--|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Climate and Environment | | | | | | | |
| Procedures and Expectations | X | | | X | | | |
| Incentives, Rewards, and Reinforcement | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Discipline and Consequences | X | X | X | X | X | | |
| Relationships and Attitude | X | | X | X | | | X |
| Instruction | X | X | | X | | | X |
| Engagement and Motivation | X | X | | | | X | X |

Note. Themes directly identified by participants derived from the original transcript. Participant A (PA), Participant B (PB), Participant C (PC), Participant D (PD), Participant E (PE), Participant F (PF), and Participant G (PG).

Summary

An analysis of the data from seven individual participant interviews was provided in this chapter. Seven interview questions were used to elicit opinions from the participants. The participants were asked to provide specific strategies that have been successfully implemented with students with disabilities in their classrooms. The interview data from each participant were then summarized.

The findings and conclusions of this study are discussed in Chapter Five. Data from the interview are considered to address the three research questions. Implications for practice are established, and recommendations for future research are suggested.

Chapter Five: Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to identify instructional and behavioral management strategies used in a variety of classroom placements by exemplary special education teachers. These strategies are used to effectively instruct and manage the behavior of students with disabilities. The USDOE (2010) provides guidance to support children with disabilities through federal regulations. These regulations set forth a strong preference to allow students with disabilities to be educated alongside their non-disabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate explicitly within the LRE (CPIR, 2017a).

According to research by Hawpe (2013), when students with disabilities are placed within the regular education environment, they are able to perform better academically and socially. Bouer (2013) reported that placement within the regular education for potential academic achievement is viewed as beneficial as the potential positive effects for the student, socially and behaviorally. The greatest influential factor with the single most impact on student achievement is the effectiveness of the teacher (Wong & Wong, 2009; Wong et al., 2014).

Findings

Research question one. What strategies do exemplary special education teachers use to instruct special education students?

Climate and environment. All participants reported working with students independently as a way to develop better a better understanding of each student as a whole. According to Marzano et al. (2017), when the environmental needs of a student are met, the student is able to focus. However, when the environmental needs are unmet, the student is only able to focus on survival (Marzano et al., 2017). Most participants

reported becoming familiar with students inside and outside of school in an effort to understand the students' interests and motivators. Some participants reported getting to know the students' family to create connections between home and school.

According to Souers and Hall (2016), social connections are built using authentic conversations which sustains a healthy environment. Most participants reported setting individual learning goals and helping the student progress toward those goals. Participants agreed that an important component of student success is creating purposefully planned opportunities to ensure the student can be successful. Most participants reported having students contribute their ideas during the activity. All participants agreed that keeping students engaged in the learning activity is essential to student achievement.

Procedures and expectations. All participants referenced specific procedures or expectations. Participant consensus indicated the necessity of classroom management plans designed to help the students learn behavioral expectations and have knowledge of what to expect before they enter the classroom. Hattie and Zierer (2018) proposed that students perform equal to expectations when the teacher has made them aware. Participants reported success when students are able to anticipate what is coming next because they have a predictable schedule with clearly established rules.

The participants in this study emphasized the importance of implementing a classroom management system starting the first day of school. All participants agreed that procedures and expectations must be in place at the beginning of the year to allow for instruction to begin. All participants suggested working together with the students to reinforce expectations by teaching, practicing, and modeling the specifics of each

procedure within the expectation. According to Marzano (2017), it is essential teachers acknowledge adherence to the rules and procedures to communicate gratitude and provide positive reinforcement.

Incentives, rewards, and reinforcements. All participants reported using a variety of rewards and reinforcements. Dion (2016) suggested positive behaviors be reinforced school-wide to ensure positive social behaviors and academic success. Some participants reported using class-wide incentives. Most participants described their reward system as a learning tool to help each student see and track their progress toward a specific learning goal. Participants described using a reinforcement system to teach cause and effect and described their reward or reinforcement systems as serving dual purposes.

Participants agreed the selected reward system should be specific to the student. Most participants indicated implementing a reward system using concrete or tangible items. All participants reported using verbal reinforcements. As detailed by Souers and Hall (2016), individuals require external feedback to know that they are valuable and to determine self-worth. Positive praise provides individuals positive self-esteem and validation (Souers & Hall, 2016).

Discipline and consequences. Participants agreed that consequences are essential to developing and cultivating the problem-solving process. Some participants reported the process of working through the problem-solving process as a consequence. Most participants indicated that a specific learning process occurs during a consequence. Most participants described the use of consequences to teach students the cause and effects of behavior choices.

Discipline helps the student understand what is not appropriate, what he or she should have done, provides ownership, and allows for problem-solving with dignity (Sieberer-Nagler, 2016). Most participants agreed student misbehavior most often occurs when students are not on task. According to Hattie and Zierer (2018), the high effect size of time on task ensures a smooth learning experience. Time on task involves the teacher and classroom lesson moving from one lesson onto the next with as few interruptions as possible, keeping the students busy (Hattie & Zierer, (2018). No participants suggested or attested to using punishment.

Relationships and attitude. All participants reported developing and maintaining genuine relationships with the student as essential to academic success. As suggested by Fisher et al. (2018), there is strong evidence the student-teacher relationship is an essential investment to ensure learning. All participants suggested developing rapport and trust with students. Each participant agreed students will not learn from someone they do not like or trust.

Marzano et al. (2017), affirmed it is essential to teach students to be aware of their positive mental dispositions by creating opportunities for them to practice within the classroom, so they are able to use those skills later in life. All participants described themselves as having a positive attitude and outlook, which is modeled to students throughout the entire school year. Participants consistently described the use of a consistently positive attitude, talk, and environment. Participants suggested a positive student-teacher relationship motivates students and makes learning more fun and interactive. Most participants reported they purposefully develop relationships with parents/guardians and frequently communicate.

Instruction. All participants reported providing direct instruction by modeling specific skills. Most participants emphasized the importance of modeling the expectation and then practicing multiple times to ensure desired classroom results. According to Rusk (2016), higher student outcomes can be correlated with effective classroom management practices.

Participants identified instruction as a strategy that ensured academic gains using high levels of student engagement and motivation. All participants suggested differentiating instruction to allow the lessons to meet the needs of individual students. To further develop student knowledge, using direct instruction, model the skills or process while walking students through the process, so they are able to see the worked example (Marzano, 2017).

Participants described using a multi-sensory visual, auditory, and kinesthetic approach through activities, technology, or creativity to keep students engaged with the instruction. Participants reportedly designed each lesson to create opportunities for success. Participants suggested using every interaction with students as a teachable moment to reinforce or redirect students. All participants described using consistent positive feedback and reinforcement.

Engagement and motivation. All participants attributed engagement within an activity or lesson as essential to student learning. According to Fisher et al. (2018), students thrive when an environment is genuinely engaging. Participants reported ensuring engagement through diversifying instruction to attract the interests of the individual student. Some participants indicated the use of scaffolding in an effort to assure successful student outcomes. All participants reported creating purposeful

opportunities for students to experience success. Some participants explained when planning for instruction, specific open-ended and leading questions are placed throughout the lesson.

The teacher additionally creates questions or opportunities for all students at all levels of the lesson. Some participants reported allowing students to have an active part in determining lessons. All participants suggested flexibility when lesson planning and during instruction. Participants agreed that the incorporation of certain instructional elements such as technology, music, and movement help ensure lesson engagement from the student. All participants testified to the use of multiple modes of engagement, activities, or tasks.

All participants attested to their efforts to purposefully develop and cultivate the student-teacher relationship. Chenoweth (2017) detailed that students care about what they are learning and discussing if they know they are cared for by the teacher. All participants indicated the essential component for motivation is the student's perceived relationship or connection with the teacher. Participants reported students are motivated by the teacher and will remain engaged within the lesson if they know they have the teacher support and are comfortable in the classroom environment.

Research question two. What strategies do exemplary special education teachers use to manage behavior of special education students?

Climate and environment. Participants identified climate and environment as being contributing factors in managing behavior. All participants specifically suggested teachers create a welcoming and inviting environment where students feel comfortable

and safe. Most participants detailed making additional efforts to ensure the environmental atmosphere is appropriate to fit the needs of a variety of students.

Marzano et al. (2017) described a sense of community should be developed fulfilling the students' foundational need for belongingness. Most participants specifically referred to their climate as positive. Some participants reported the greatest impact on the classroom environment was achieved by focusing on the positives at all times. All participants identified their classroom atmospheres as welcoming, comfortable, and inviting. Dion (2016) suggested creating an environmental norm where appropriate behavior is positive and reinforced.

Additionally, participants suggested ensuring that the teacher sets a positive tone at the start and the end of each class. Most participants described an environment integrating opportunities to incorporate movement, music, singing, and creativity. Participants indicated that teachers create a positive environment by modeling positive talk and positive teacher-student interactions. Most participants suggested making personal connections to students' lives by asking questions and taking an interest.

Procedures and expectations. Most participants reported that students were involved in the rule and procedure-making processes. All participants reported teaching and implementing procedures the first day of school. Most reported investing a significant amount of time at the beginning of the school year, providing specific instruction related to rules, procedures, expectations, consequences, rewards, and incentives.

All participants indicated procedures were taught using explicit direct instruction, frequently practiced, and revised throughout the year as needed. All participants reported the use of schedules or planned instructional time. Most participants indicated the use of a visual chart for expectations or rules to visit and refer to if needed.

According to Rusk (2016), teachers who clearly communicated expectations and posted their classroom rules had fewer office referrals because the implementation of positive behavioral interventions creates a sense of respect and community. Hattie and Zierer (2018) associated higher student outcomes with appropriate high expectations. Overall, participants described unstructured time as the time in which misbehavior most often occurs.

Incentives, rewards, and reinforcements. Some participants suggested using a reward system to ensure an opportunity where the students can experience success. Most participants reported using a reward system to elicit and ensure positive classroom behavior. Participants reported that students earn a reward following a good choice.

As reported by Souers and Hall (2016), to reduce reactionary systems, teachers must employ early intervention strategies. Reinforcements were reported by most participants as tangible concrete items. All participants indicated verbal praise was consistently used within the classroom. Identifying and ensuring the use of positive affective tones used by the teachers can be used to reinforce expectations (Marzano, 2017).

Discipline and consequences. All participants were in agreement to use consequences. Most participants reported allowing students to make mistakes and then using those as a learning opportunity. According to Chenoweth (2017), a basic discipline

approach uses student misbehavior as an opportunity to redirect them and refocus them back to their academic achievement goals.

No participant discussed discipline. Sieberer-Nagler (2016) described discipline as an action taken by the teacher in response to a students' behavior. No participants recommended the use of punishments. Some participants reported the use of punishments with students will result in negative effects due to the negatively perceived association with punishment from a prior experience.

Relationships and attitude. A vital contributing factor identified by participants was quality relationships and positive attitudes. All participants agreed that trust is essential in an effective teacher-student relationship. All participants suggested building rapport with students by finding out their likes, dislikes, what motivates them, and what does not motivate them.

Components to building relationships, as reported by Marzano (2017), are indicating affection for students using verbal and nonverbal behaviors as well as understanding students' backgrounds and interests. Most participants stated they attend extracurricular activities of which their students are involved. Most participants reported purposefully asking questions in an effort to get to know their students' interests and what motivates them.

Participants attested that positive relationships allowed them to better identify the cause of student behaviors. Most participants described behavior as a form of communication. As concluded by Fisher et al. (2018), productive, healthy relationships benefit the students, teachers, and leaders by making school a better place to be.

Instruction. Instruction was identified as a main factor in managing the behavior of students. All participants recommended beginning instruction with modeling. All participants emphasized the importance of teaching, modeling, and practicing appropriate behaviors. Participants suggested keeping students interested and engaged in the classroom by meeting their multi-sensory needs during each lesson and allowing students to display their knowledge using multiple modes. As recommended by Marzano et al. (2017), incorporating physical activity into the classroom may improve on-task student behavior.

All participants testified to the intentional use of engaging activities to attract the students to learning. Participants reported redirection of inappropriate behaviors by immediately communicating expectations and engaging with the students. Most participants suggested allowing students to make mistakes that provide the experience to partake in trial and error behavior interactions to develop a baseline. Hattie and Zierer (2018) suggested establishing a climate of trust and comfort where the students feel they are able to ask questions and make mistakes.

Engagement and motivation. All participants reported the use of positive talk within the classroom. Most participants suggested ensuring students do not become disengaged within the lesson. Most participants suggested allowing for flexibility during the lesson and adjusting instruction as needed to keep students engaged. According to Bulson (2015), teachers must create sufficient opportunities consisting of structured and unstructured time to cultivate the teacher-student relationship.

All participants reported the use of a reward system to promote motivation. All participants suggested looking at the individual student to determine a motivational strategy. Reward systems were reportedly based on individual student preferences. As reported by Hattie and Zierer (2018), a variety of methods must be used to reach every learner.

Research question three. What types of professional learning have contributed to exemplary special education teachers' best-practices for instructing and managing behavior?

When asked to identify what professional knowledge had contributed to each participant's knowledge within each area, all participants continually and consistently indicated experience. Each participant specified her experience had been gained by working directly with children. As displayed in Table 1, all participants had extensive teaching experience working in the field of education. Some participants reported additional experience gain from working in a related area of child service to include group homes, behavioral health services, and social services.

Most participants identified continuing education as essential to their effectiveness. Some participants identified specific professional development or programs, which contributed to the essential elements implemented in their current classrooms. During the course of the interviews, two participants directly identified the work of Harry Wong. All participants reported they actively seek out additional professional development provided locally or offered at the regional, state, or national level. Some participants specified additional training and instructional knowledge was developed through graduate studies to include a master's, specialist, or doctoral program.

Overall the participants identified themselves as continual learners who aspire to learn and contribute to the field of education. All participants reported an essential component of being an effective teacher is the willingness to seek out additional knowledge. All participants additionally suggested they aspire to ensure student achievement by helping fellow teachers and colleges better understand the effective strategies used within their classrooms with success.

Conclusions

The conclusions were derived from research and participant data. Themes were attained through the synthesis of the data. Discussed in this chapter are the findings of themes and how each theme corresponds with the research questions.

With relation to the conceptual framework by Wong and Wong (2009), several commonalities were determined. Wong et al. (2014) conveyed the most important aspect for success is the daily connection the teacher makes with the students. All participants within this study testified they meet and greet students upon entering the classroom. When students are greeted at the door and enter into a pleasant environment, they understand they are wanted, safe, and are more likely to follow directions and requests (Wong & Wong, 2009).

All participants described their environment as positive and engaging. All participants attested to their intentional relationship development with each student. As stated by Souers and Hall (2016), teachers must know their students, connect with them, and build strong relationships to have a successful classroom.

Most participants detailed modeling as an essential factor for student success. Participants indicated positive modeling for behavior and social interactions. Many

participants additionally stated they model and communicate their thinking process during instruction.

Effective teachers, according to Wong and Wong (2009), manage their classrooms with structures, routines, and procedures. All participants of this study specified established procedures or routines used daily. All participants reported procedures and routines were taught explicitly or through direct instruction, practiced frequently, and revisited as necessary. Wong et al. (2014) suggested procedures for every classroom activity should be taught, rehearsed, and reinforced.

All participants indicated instruction began the first day of school, and participants reported to have high expectations for students and an anticipation the students would succeed. All participants indicated the use of rewards or reinforcements. Most participants specifically identified using rewards as incentives for both learning and behavior.

Wong et al. (2014) detailed reinforcements as verbal direction or praise used to help encourage appropriate behavior using behavior-specific language. No participant acknowledged the use of punishment. All participants detailed consequences as learning opportunities where student choices are part of a larger, cause-effect lesson. All consequences are either positive or negative and a result of a chosen action (Wong & Wong, 2009).

Most participants reported setting individual goals with students to improve learning and behavioral outcomes. Wong and Wong (2009) suggested ensuring students take control of their learning by involving them in their learning accomplishments. Participants described purposefully designing instruction to engage students in learning

using multi-sensory lessons. Participants identified a variety of instructional elements used to maintain motivation and engagement.

Implications for Practice

This study was guided by the direct testimony of participants identified as exemplary teachers in the field of special education. The participants' exemplary status permits the strategies identified within the testimonies to be evidence of effective practices. The identified strategies within this study should be reviewed, adjusted, and implemented by teachers as needed to ensure an effective instructional environment.

Additional professional development time should be allocated by the district throughout the school year for all teachers specific to implementation and planning practices using the effective best-practices identified within this study. During this additional time, teachers should be provided and briefed on district and building policies and procedures. Additionally, based on the evaluative design of the administrator to teacher relationship, administrators should instruct all staff in specific building expectations. During this time, teachers should collaboratively work with building administrators or mentors to develop or adapt classroom management plans and instructional practices to align with specific building practices, requirements, and expectations.

Building administrators should provide support and determine clear steps for corrective action, professional development, or additional training. District buildings will maintain a positive environment by continually implementing positive support systems. Building leaders should ensure collaborative planning between the newly hired teacher

and the prior teacher. This collaboration will ensure a smooth transition and provide information specific to each student's learning styles and environmental needs.

Building administrators should additionally be monitoring the professional development activities of all teachers which they supervise. As cited by Bloomberg and Pitchford (2017), school leaders make the most difference by promoting and participating in continual professional development with teachers. According to the information gain from this study, continual professional development is essential to creating, developing, and maintaining an effective classroom where student misbehavior is reduced and instructional time is maximized. Building administrators should use the evaluative process to account and track individual continued professional development.

At the classroom level, teachers should design their classrooms, so they are able to attend to a variety of classroom student learning styles. The findings of this study included specific components, which should be implemented in the classroom. Teachers should develop or make changes to their current classroom management plan to ensure appropriate behavior through clearly identified procedures and expectations. Teachers must develop a classroom environment that is welcoming and positive.

To ensure maximum instructional potential within the classroom, a teacher must develop lessons to engage the learners and motivate them to participate in a higher level of learning. Teachers must continually seek out professional development to add to existing knowledge and ensure current methodologies are incorporated. According to Hall and Simeral (2015), teachers should seek to learn about initiatives, build on their skills, and evaluate the effectiveness of the initiatives in continual pursuit of knowledge.

During evaluative collaboration with building administrators, teachers must review classroom practices and adjust as needed.

Based on the findings within this study, increased emphasis should be placed on developing the individual as a teacher. Teacher preparatory programs should reduce instruction concentrated on foundational information, which is ingrained into many introductory courses to allow additional non-traditional instructional time or alternative courses. Furthermore, based on the findings of this study, preparatory programs could increase instructional practices during introductory coursework to focus on developing proactive strategies and plans to implement the first day of school.

Additionally, teacher preparatory programs should incorporate courses derived from other professions closely related to the teaching profession, such as counseling and social work. This additional or substitutional coursework is essential to accommodate the continually changing parameters of the teaching profession. The changing generational diversities require teachers of current classrooms to be equipped with a vast set of skills to meet the increasingly diverse needs of the students placed within their classrooms.

Recommendations for Future Research

Much of the previous research within the area has been derived from a variety of sources to include regular and special education. The research collected during this study was designed for use with students with disabilities within the regular education classroom by the regular education teacher. Further research in the area could more precisely analyze the critical components of effective practices to use in a variety of classroom placements. Additional research and further studies should be conducted in this area to further identify strategies that are effective across curricular areas.

The findings from this study were derived from participant interviews. Valuable additional information could have been collected in addition to the interview data by conducting classroom observations of each participant to add depth to the study. Observational data could be used to support and provide a rich description of the interviewee's perceptions.

Classroom observations should identify specific practices, report environmental specifications, as well as identify a specific tone or atmosphere within the classroom. Classroom observations could be recorded and photographed to ensure appropriate reflection. Future studies could include pictorial representations of the elements described in this study.

Several factors to consider are demographic or logistical data. Future studies could take into account the socioeconomic status of the students served by each participant. This could be accomplished by including the percentage rates of the free and reduced-price meal populations.

The study could include the enrollment of each district. An additional factor to consider in future research is the geographical locations of the awarded teachers. The participants in this study were comprised of individuals geographically located within the eastern coast of the United States to include Massachusetts, New Jersey, Alabama, and Florida. Geographical and logistical data could be essential in identifying more progressive or regressive areas.

Most participants within this study reported the use of a multisensory approach to instruction. Participants specifically referred to differentiating their instruction to meet the individual needs of the learner. Most participants suggested purposefully designing

instruction which incorporated movement or the use of kinesthetic learning. As stated by Antonetti and Garver (2015), “Movement stimulates the protein that keeps neurons connecting (p. 36). Better cognition and higher rates of concentration are provided when the brain releases necessary chemicals through exercise and movement (Antonetti & Garver, 2015).

The increased incorporation of project-based learning is recommended as an area of focus for future research. Fisher et al. (2018) suggested project-based learning allows students the opportunity to use their knowledge in a unique way. According to the research collected within this study and participant verification, project-based learning may have a significant impact on student achievement.

Future studies could investigate teacher preparatory programs. Many participants within this study confirmed their additional knowledge in the area was gained through continued educational degrees to include masters, specialist, and a doctoral degree. Graduate programs could be reviewed to determine what type of instructional program provided the most benefit. Also, graduate programs could be reviewing by comparing traditional campus instruction in contrast to online degree programs.

Additional research is needed to identify specific character traits possessed by exemplary teachers. The researcher further recommends repeating the study to encompass a larger population of educators and potentially include the perceptions of students and parents. Additional influential study results could include the National Teacher of the Year award recipients to provide a larger sample of the population. The study could also be repeated to include state level Teacher of the Year award recipients.

The state level review could provide a more specific sample to ensure common standards throughout a particular state.

Summary

In Chapter One, the background was presented. As ensured through federal law, all students are entitled to a free appropriate public education. Specific policies and procedures have been set by the federal government to use as guidance for states and public school districts. The foundational information was used to provide a basis for the previous and current status of the Department of Education in relation to special education laws, regulations, policies, and practices.

The conceptual framework was presented based on the 2009 and 2014 publication of Wong, which was used to guide the qualitative research study. Wong et al. (2009, 2014) identified and expanded on specific classroom management procedures and practices which once implemented by an effective teacher improve classroom instruction and learning. The statement of the problem was articulated to provide evidence supporting the need for additional research in the area. The purpose of this study was stated, which was to identify effective best-practice strategies used to instruct and manage students with disabilities in a variety of classroom placements.

Following the specification of the purpose of the study, three research questions were posed. The significance of the study was detailed, whereby the rationale was articulated. By conducting this study, findings may be added to the research base by identifying specific, best-practice strategies that teachers can implement to ensure an effective classroom is designed to include students with disabilities. Limitations and assumptions of the study were identified and discussed in the chapter.

In Chapter Two, a review of the relevant literature was conducted. The conceptual framework for the study was reviewed to specifically isolate and identify information regarding classroom management. Several reoccurring components were identified in the literature. Specific components were identified and reviewed by the chapter to include the following: classroom management; climate and environment; incentives, rewards, and reinforcement; discipline and consequences; relationships and attitude; instruction; procedures and expectations; engagement and motivation; and teacher perceptions and preparation.

The methodology utilized in the study was discussed in Chapter Three. The problem and purpose of the study were identified and discussed, and the research questions were reviewed. The data collected within this study were elicited from a population and sample of participants who have been determined exemplary in the field of special education as recipients of the Clarissa Hug Teacher of the Year Award by the CEC. Interview participants were purposely selected as recipients within the last 10 years to ensure participant data were relevant and best suited for the study (Fraenkel et al., 2014). The perceptions and testimonies of the participants provided best-practice guidance for regular and special education teachers working with students with disabilities in a variety of classroom placements.

The instrumentation created for data collection were seven open-ended interview questions. The interview questions were designed to elicit the participants' points of view and identify potential themes (Creswell, 2015; Seidman 2013). For each interview question, the participants were asked to provide their perception of specific strategies which work effectively for students with disabilities. Following each interview question,

an additional question was asked to identify the specific professional development acquired which has contributed to their knowledge in the area. Following data collection, the data were analyzed within the chapter.

Within Chapter Four, the background of the study was again reviewed to support the significance of the qualitative study. Specifications for identification of interview participant selection were recognized, and the interview results were discussed. Several thematic commonalities were identified between and among the participants’ testimonies.

Each interview question was discussed, supported by participant input, and summarized. A synopsis of the participant perceptions was included in this chapter. The data revealed all participants employed similar strategies to ensure effective management of students’ behaviors and increased instructional gains. As reported by Fisher et al. (2018), effective classrooms are developed by teachers who profoundly understand the essentials of the classroom.

Chapter Five included the identification of themes in relation to the research questions. Themes identified and connected to research questions one and two were identified as the following: climate and environment; relationships and attitude; instruction; procedure and expectations; engagement and motivation; incentives, rewards and reinforcements; and discipline and consequences. In reference to research question three, all participants reported professional knowledge in the area was gained through experience.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions for Exemplary Special Education Teachers

- 1) In your experience, what instructional strategies have you used to produce the greatest academic gains with special education students?
 - a) What type of professional learning do you feel contributed to this?
- 2) In your experience, when and how do you communicate and set high positive expectations for academic achievement and appropriate behavior?
 - a) What type of professional learning do you feel contributed to this?
- 3) In your experience, how do you develop and maintain a positive learning environment and climate?
 - a) What type of professional learning do you feel contributed to this?
- 4) In your experience, what strategies do you use to develop relationships and maintain a positive attitude to ensure academic and behavioral success of your students?
 - a) What type of professional learning do you feel contributed to this?
- 5) In your experience, what strategies help contribute to high levels of student engagement and motivation?
 - a) What type of professional learning do you feel contributed to this?
- 6) What specific procedures or routines do you use to maximize instructional time and minimize student misbehavior?
 - a) When and how do you teach these?
 - b) What type of professional learning do you feel contributed to this?
- 7) In your experience, how do you use incentives, rewards, and reinforcements or discipline and consequences?
 - a) What type of professional learning do you feel contributed to this?

Appendix B

LINDENWOOD

LINDENWOOD UNIVERSITY ST. CHARLES, MISSOURI

DATE: August 29, 2017

TO: Shawna Gruben
FROM: Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board

STUDY TITLE: [1116148-1] Perceptions of Exemplary Special Education Teachers:
Instructional and Management Strategies for Special Education Students

IRB REFERENCE #:
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
DECISION DATE: August 29, 2017

REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category # 1

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research study. Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations.

We will put a copy of this correspondence on file in our office.

If you have any questions, please send them to IRB@lindenwood.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Lindenwood University Institutional Review Board's records.

Appendix C

Initial Contact Email

Dear (Name of Participant),

My name is Shawna Gruben, and I am a Council for Exceptional Children member. I am completing a study in partial fulfillment for a doctoral degree through Lindenwood University in Missouri. I obtained your name from the CEC's Clarissa Hug Teacher of the Year Award recipients and would like to invite you to participate in my research study.

I am specifically requesting your participation in the form of an interview. I hope you will consider a face-to-face interview or electronic. The interview would focus on strategies you currently use or the perceptions of those strategies as well as what type of professional learning you feel contributed to your success.

My study is titled, *Perceptions of Exemplary Special Education Teachers: Instruction and Management Strategies for Special Education Students*. The purpose of the research study is to identify specific best-practice strategies special education teachers use to effectively instruct and manage the behavior of special education students in a variety of classroom placements.

If you are interested in participating, I will email you the study research questions and interview questions. I would additionally like to follow-up by determining a date, time, and location for the interview.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Shawna Gruben

Appendix D

LINDENWOOD

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Perceptions of Exemplary Special Education Teachers:
Instructional and Management Strategies
for Special Education Students

Principal Investigator: Shawna Gruben

Telephone: Email:

Participant _____ Contact info _____

1. You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Shawna Gruben, under the guidance of advisor Dr. Brad Hanson. The purpose of this study is to identify specific best practice instructional and management strategies special education teachers use to effectively instruct and manage behavior of special education students in a variety of classroom placements.
2. Your participation will involve:
 - a) Participation in a face-to-face or phone interview.
 - b) The amount of time involved in your participation will be approximately one hour.
 - c) Approximately 5-10 Clarissa Hug Teacher of the Year award recipients will be interviewed.
3. There are no anticipated risks associated with this research.
4. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study. However, your participation will contribute to the knowledge about best practices used by exemplary special education teachers.
5. Your participation is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate in this research study or to withdraw your consent at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. You will NOT be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate or to withdraw.

6. We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. As part of this effort, your identity will not be revealed in any publication or presentation that may result from this study and the information collected will remain in the possession of the investigator in a safe location.
7. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise, you may call the Investigator, Shawna Gruben, at xxx-xxxx, or the Supervising Faculty, Dr. Brad Hanson, at xxx-xxxx. You may also ask questions of or state concerns regarding your participation to the Lindenwood Institutional Review Board (IRB).

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I may retain a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my participation in the research described above.

By participating in the interview, I acknowledge my consent to participate in the research study.

Vita

Shawna Gruben attended and graduated from the Mountain Grove School District in 2002. Following high school, Shawna attended the University of Missouri Columbia for two years. She then transferred to Missouri State University in Springfield, Missouri, where she obtained a Bachelor of Science in Psychology while substituting at a variety of school districts. Upon completion of her bachelor's degree she began employment at Burrell Behavioral Health.

Shawna then obtained employment with the St. Johns Child Development Center in Springfield. During the course of her employment Shawna became certified in sign language. Upon enrolling at Drury University in Springfield, Missouri, in 2010, she obtained her first teaching job and then completed her Masters of Education in Special Education in 2012. In 2015, Shawna completed an Education Specialist degree through Lindenwood University. Shawna has been employed with the Mountain Grove School District as the process coordinator for five years. She is now serving the 2018-2019 school year as the Special Programs Director.