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Preparation For Teaching Students With Emotional Disabilities: A Comparison Of Perceptions Of Teachers With A Mild Intervention License And Teachers With An Emotional Disabilities License

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PREPARATION FOR TEACHING STUDENTS WITH EMOTIONAL DISABILITIES: A

COMPARISON OF PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS WITH A MILD INTERVENTION

LICENSE AND TEACHERS WITH AN EMOTIONAL DISABILITIES LICENSE

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by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to compare perceptions of preparedness to teach students with emotional disabilities (ED) between teachers with a mild intervention license and teachers with an ED license. The study examined the perceptions of five teachers with a mild intervention license and five teachers with an ED license as derived through one on one personal interviews. A qualitative transcendental phenomenology methodology was chosen for the study to capture the lived experiences of the participants through the authentic interview process. Major findings were that teachers with a mild intervention license did not perceive themselves to be prepared in behavior management, environmental supports, or social skills. Teachers with an ED license felt more prepared in behavior management and environmental supports. Both groups of teacher candidates revealed structural themes of lonely and only, empathy and relationships, and deflection and perseverance. The teachers with a mild intervention license revealed a fourth structural theme which was trial and error. In contrast, the teachers with an ED license revealed a fourth different structural theme of experience and exposure. The essence of the *lived experience* of teaching students with ED revealed that a larger body of knowledge in all the critical element areas would benefit teachers preparing to teach students with ED.

PREFACE

The basis for this research originally stemmed from my previous teaching experience with students with emotional disabilities. It was the article by Simpson et al. (2011) outlining program elements critical to students with emotional and behavioral disabilities that piqued my interest in the perception of preparedness for teaching this population and understanding if there were perceptual variances in training and licensure.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to acknowledge the impact my mother had on my life and career. Who I am, who I was as a teacher, how I continue to interact with students, is based on the simple essences of truth that she quietly instilled in me. She would say, "All children want to please." One of the last questions she asked was if I had finished my dissertation.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Educators in Indiana public schools face the challenge of providing an appropriate public education that is free to students, including students with emotional disabilities. According to the Indiana Department of Education (P. Wright, personal communication, October 15, 2015), 11,267 students in Indiana were classified as having an emotional disability (ED) in 2014. A special education student having an emotional disability may be programmed into a variety of settings including general classrooms, resource classrooms, self-contained special education classrooms, or alternative settings (Bullock & Gable, 2006). Leko et al. (2015) stated, "Political pundits assert traditional teacher preparation has been ineffective in preparing preservice teachers to be able to secure adequate student achievement gains" (p. 27) regarding special education. Brownell et al. (2010) stated, "Special education teacher educators must rethink what makes a quality special education teacher, and that process should be informed by the field's history and by the trends in policy, service delivery, and research that have shaped special education and teacher education practice" (p. 358). Students with ED require special management and instructional strategies (Bullock & Gable, 2006). Qualitative research guides the investigator to a better understanding of actual lived experiences of individuals. The researcher will compare the perceived level of preparedness to teach ED students by interviewing teachers with a mild intervention license and teachers with an ED license. The teacher candidates share the lived experience of teaching ED students. Their perceptions of

preparedness to teach ED based on preparatory experiences for their required licensure will be compared using a transcendental phenomenological process.

Background of the Problem

Since Public Law 94-142 was enacted in 1975, students identified as ED are eligible for special services and provisions and least restrictive environments specific to their needs (Bullock & Gable, 2006). For over three decades, educational leaders have documented the lack of quality outcomes for students with ED. Knitzer and Olsen (1982) noted only one-third of children impacted by ED received services due to a lack of provisions and placement continuums for their disability. Shortages in the number of qualified special education teachers and licensure changes have also impacted services provided to students with ED (Boe et al., 1996; Gitomer & Latham, 2000; Nougaret et al., 2005). The need to use alternative methods to instruct and remediate students with ED has motivated educational leaders to review what defines and encompasses successful intervention strategies for the emotionally disabled (Simpson et al., 2011).

Statement of the Problem

Students with behavior- or emotion-related disabilities receive instruction outside of the general classroom at a higher rate than students diagnosed with other types of disabilities (Bullock & Gable, 2006). Students with ED require specific critical intervention elements provided by trained special educators. Walker et al. (2013) stated, "To improve student outcomes, it appears that we must continue to explore strategies to help frontline professionals better translate research effective programs and interventions to better support students with EBD [*sic*]" (p. 3). In conjunction with ideas of improving student outcomes, Bullock and Gable (2006) stated, "We cannot expect that appropriate educational programming will occur without teachers who have an understanding of ED and who possess the skills to plan and implement

management and instructional strategies that meet the individual" (p. 11). Some inclusive movements have not always adhered to least restrictive environment parameters (Stainbeck & Stainbeck, 1996) and appropriate educational programming and services for students with ED continues to be critical and relevant. A lack of information exists in evaluating whether preparatory training for teachers of ED was more robust and detailed regarding critical program strategies and elements with a training for an ED license, in comparison to the preparatory training for a mild intervention license.

Purpose of the Study

This dissertation specifically focused on the perception of preparedness to teach ED students by comparing perceptions of teachers with a mild intervention license to the perceptions of teachers with an ED license based on preparatory experiences for the required licensure. This qualitative study considered a teacher with a mild intervention license as a teacher who has met the Indiana Department of Education parameters for receiving a mild intervention license or endorsement. This study considered a teacher with an ED license as a teacher who has met the Indiana Department of Education parameters for receiving a license for ED, Emotional Handicap (EH), Severe Emotional Handicap (SEH), or Intense Intervention. This study sought to understand perceptions of preparedness from each group of interview candidates using a transcendental phenomenological process. Simpson et al. (2011) discussed seven essential elements for programming for emotional and behavioral disorders. Simpson et al. (2011) stated, "Other effective practice elemental components include (a) environmental supports, (b) behavior management systems, (c) social skill and social interpretation training and social interaction programs, (d) learning and academic support methods, (e) parent and family involvement programs, and (f) community supports" (p. 234). The seven essential elements outlined by

Simpson et al. (2011) would guide a portion of the interview investigation and analysis of preparedness in each area.

Significance of the Study

A lack of clear evidence exists in evaluating whether preparatory training for teachers of ED was more thorough regarding critical program strategies and elements with a training for an ED license, in comparison to the preparatory training for teachers with a mild intervention license. The information garnered from this study may reveal critical gaps or advancements in teacher preparation programs that could steer future training and preparatory programs. An understanding of critical training elements could facilitate optimal programming for teachers in training. Results of the study could possibly guide state licensure guidelines or teacher preparation for teachers aspiring to work with ED.

This study might supplement the research regarding the essential elements necessary to train teachers of ED. This study could lead to comprehensive universal guidelines for program parameters for students with behavior- or emotion-related disabilities in all settings. It could also guide Response to Intervention (RTI) and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) plans and programs. The research could steer the direction of college preparatory programs for teachers aspiring to teach students with behavioral or emotional special education eligibilities. The research information could bring to light other factors such as teacher shortages, the impact of inclusion, or licensure changes that may have also affected changes in college preparation for specialized teachers aspiring to work with students with emotional disabilities.

Creswell (2007) noted, "A phenomenology provides a deep understanding of a phenomenon as experienced by several individuals" (p. 82). This study based on phenomenology

will involve teachers who have experienced teaching students with ED and their individual perceptions of preparedness based on licensure.

Research Questions

The grand tour question that the researcher sought to answer is, "Are there differences in the perception of preparedness to teach students with emotional disabilities between teachers having an ED license and teachers with a mild intervention license?" The dissertation will focus on three key research questions for the dissertation. These questions will steer the intention of the study.

1. "What are the perceptions of teachers with a mild intervention license about how well prepared they were for teaching ED?"

2. "How do the perceptions of teachers with a mild intervention license contrast with the perceptions of ED licensed teachers in regard to preparedness to teach ED?"

3. "What are the possible implications for the preparation of special education teachers of the emotionally disabled?"

Research Design

A qualitative phenomenological study of teachers' perceptions of preparedness to teach ED was conducted. The first group of participants included five teachers having a mild intervention license who have taught in a self-contained classroom or resource classroom including students with ED. The second group of participants included five teachers having an ED license who have taught in a self-contained classroom or resource classroom including students with ED. Data were primarily drawn from interviews with individual participants. A first interview involved using specific questions to be used to facilitate analysis of the seven key element areas as described by Simpson et al. (2011) and aid in the discussion of perception of

preparedness in each of the element areas. A second interview presented open-ended questions to learn more of the teachers' perceptions of preparedness to teach ED and concluding thoughts on level of preparedness and critical elements. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. Data were analyzed using Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenology method. Phenomenological analysis of data will be divided into three stages based on the transcendental phenomenological method. The three stages of analysis include phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis of meaning and variation (Moustakas, 1994). The research design will be examined for purposeful construct, fidelity, and confidentiality.

Theoretical Framework

To learn more about the actual lived experience of teachers with different licensure qualifications and their experience with teaching ED, a qualitative phenomenological research method was chosen for this study. Moustakas (1994) stated, "The phenomenon is perceived and described in its totality, in a fresh and open way" (p. 34). There are seven key element areas for programming ED, as described by Simpson et al. (2011). The theoretical framework supporting qualified professionals educating students with emotional disabilities, effective behavior management, student outcomes, effective social skills frameworks, community support needs and evidence-based academic supports will be informed by Carl Rogers. Rogers (1969) stated, "Schools can, if they wish, deal with students in ways that stimulate and facilitate significant and self-reliant learning" (p. 3). Rogers' three core conditions are also acknowledged and paralleled regarding preparing teachers of ED.

"One's ability to perform a task or achieve a goal is influenced by the individual's perception of his or her own ability" (Bandura, 1977, pp. 192–193). Research on teacher preparedness to teach is linked to the individual's perception of preparedness. Gibson and

Dembo (1984) stated, "Teacher efficacy has been identified as a variable for individual differences in teaching effectiveness" (p. 569). Preliminary data suggest that the competency of teachers is known to yield achievement gains in classroom behavior. Understanding specifically the perceived level of preparedness to teach ED students comparing perceptions of teachers with a mild intervention license to the perceptions of teachers with an ED license based on preparatory experiences for the required licensure parallels with Moustakas' (1994) view of understanding the perceptions of an individual's lived experience. Limited literature exists on the perception of teachers of ED on their level of preparedness as it relates to self-image or self-efficacy.

> Rogers (1986) stated,
>
> It is that the individual has within himself or herself vast resources for self-understanding, for altering his or her self-concept, attitudes and self-directed behavior—and that these resources can be tapped if only a definable climate of facilitative psychological attitudes can be provided. (p. 258)

Rogers' three core conditions are also acknowledged and paralleled regarding preparing teachers of ED. Rogers (1957) noted that client-centered relationships or therapy operates based on three core principles that mirror the perspective of the therapist to the client. The three core conditions involve congruence, unconditional positive regard, and empathy. These key theoretical models support and provide a theoretical framework to the study.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

I was transparent in the process of documenting interviews and statements of participants. I used confidential techniques and self-checked for fidelity throughout the research study. I strove, based on Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenology, to provide self-evident

truths through the process of participant interviews. A sincere and forthright effort was made to obtain participants who were qualified by the specifications of the study outline and purpose. It is noted that certain limitations or changes in participants' availability to participate in all sessions of the research process may have been unavoidable. Delimitations that have been set in the study include determining that this qualitative study would define a teacher with a mild intervention license as a teacher that has met the IDOE parameters for receiving a mild licensure or endorsement. The study considered a teacher with ED licensure as a teacher that has met the IDOE parameters for receiving a license for ED, EH, SEH, or Intense Intervention.

Definitions of Terms

Emotional Disability--"An inability to learn or progress that cannot be explained by cognitive, sensory, or health factors. The student exhibits one (1) or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects educational performance: (1) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems, (2) A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression, (3) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships, (4) Inappropriate behaviors or feelings under normal circumstances, (5) Episodes of psychosis" (Indiana State Board of Education, 2014, p. 72).

Self-Contained Setting--" Separate classroom in a general education school building with special education and related services provided outside the general education classroom during the instructional day." (Indiana State Board of Education, 2014, p. 91). *Resource Room Setting*–" Resource room with special education and related services provided outside the general

education classroom during the instructional day" " (Indiana State Board of Education, 2014, p. 91).

Summary

This qualitative, transcendental phenomenological research study compared the perceived preparedness level of teachers that teach ED students with a mild intervention license to teachers with an ED license. Five chapters comprise the study. Chapter 1 of the study reviews all major components of the study including an introduction to the study, statement of the problem, purpose and significance of the study, research questions, definitions of terms, delimitations, limitations, and a summary. Presented in Chapter 2 is a review of the related literature. The review includes an introduction, theoretical framework, historical background of ED, training and licensure history, qualified professionals, classroom environmental supports, behavior management, social skills training, and recommended research. Chapter 3 of the study includes an introduction to the research methodology and design. Research questions, participants, variables, instrumentation, data collection procedures, trustworthiness, consistency, and a summary comprise chapter three. Chapter 4 offers the summary and analysis of collected data. Chapter 5 presents a review of findings, implications, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter 2 will summarize the prevailing expertise in the field of education regarding the

preparation of teachers to teach students with ED in self-contained or resource room settings.

Research supporting theoretical frameworks within the study will be reviewed. The historical

background of special education, training, licensure, teacher shortages, and movements to

support and service mental health and ED will be reviewed. Key program elements will be noted

in the literature review as it relates to program training and perception of preparedness. Simpson et al. (2011) have outlined seven essential elements for the programming of emotional and behavioral disorders. Simpson et al. (2011) stated, "Other effective practice elemental components include (a) environmental supports, (b) behavior management systems, (c) social skill and social interpretation training and social interaction programs, (d) learning and academic support methods, (e) parent and family involvement programs, and (f) community supports" (p. 234). These paramount features utilized in the programming of ED students will be reviewed. Information for the literature review is garnered from professional peer-reviewed research articles, books, and other accessible authentically printed material and historical documents.

Historical Background

Investigations, evaluations, and attempts to support children and adolescents with mental health concerns were first noted early in the twentieth century (Bullock & Gable, 2006). Levine (2015) noted, "Indeed, it was not until the creation of the National Institute of Mental Health in 1949, with funding to support research, training, and service that an alternative federally funded training path opened to train some mental health professionals" (p. 22). Services to support the mental health of individuals evolved and modern-day programming started in 1961 with the Joint Commission on Mental Health and Illness. Levine noted, "The report was the impetus for President John F. Kennedy's address to Congress in 1963 and for the Community Mental Health Act passed that year" (p. 22). In 1975, Public Law 94-142 (Education for all Handicapped Children Act of 1975) was passed by Congress. Levine stated, "Today, the needs of children and adolescents with all manner of disabilities are served through the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act" (p. 24). In social arenas and academic classrooms, children with ED are challenged to sustain attention and

manage self-control, which may lead to a development of feelings of inadequacy and frustration that initiates externalizing or internalizing behaviors (Al-Hendawi, 2012). Due to a lack of strategic coping skills, children with ED often participate in inappropriate externalizing or internalizing actions in response to stressful conflict or situations, which slows the development of successful social navigation (Maag, 2006). Students with ED labor to interact with peers and adults. They struggle to share or communicate needs and desires. They do not respond to the demands of social situations appropriately (Maag, 2006; Quinn et al., 1999). The social inadequacies of children with ED often incites feelings of negativity in others, including teachers. This negatively affects the student-teacher relationship (Sutherland et al., 2008).

There is an understanding that, historically, there has been growth in services for students with ED, but the magnitude of challenges faced by this population demands best efforts to provide continued high-quality service (Bullock & Gable, 2006). Anderson et al. (2015) stated, "Schools serving communities with high rates of poverty face the profound challenge of meeting the needs of students who are often exposed to significant family and environmental stressors and trauma" (p. 113). Trauma-informed practices described by Anderson et al. include socio-emotional development and problem-solving skills. Children who experience trauma have a heightened risk of physical, mental, and behavioral challenges occurring (Cooper, 2010). Students with ED that withdraw, have outbursts, or act in defiance are viewed differently when examined through a trauma-informed lens of understanding (Ko et al., 2008). A key component of a trauma-informed school is a partnership between all school personnel to care for all students (Bloom, 1995) which supports the ideology of community support systems for the servicing of students with ED. Trauma-informed practices and understanding add to the background and historical story of students with ED.

Even with average intelligence scores, students with ED demonstrate mathematic, reading, and writing score disparities in testing below their peers (Nelson et al., 2004; Reid et al., 2004). Academic difficulties appear early and persist with students who have ED (Mooney et al., 2005). Both male and female students with ED under perform their same-aged peers by one to two years (Nelson et al., 2004; Reid et al., 2004). Students with ED experiencing delays in academics paired with lack of social success over time are subjected to a myriad of subsequent problems. These later outcomes include lower graduation rates, peer rejection, course failure, absenteeism, and higher dropout rates (Mooney et al., 2005; Nelson et al., 2004; Reid et al., 2004; Wagner & Newman, 2012). "Children and youth with EBD are dramatically under identified and underserved" (Landrum et al., 2003, p. 54). A variety of leveled educational placements are generally available for students with ED. The services range from consultation all the way to day treatment or residential care (Rozalski et al., 2010). The number of students with ED assigned to more restrictive placements has increased nationwide even though the public has embraced the inclusive movement and its ideology (Hughes & Adera, 2006).

In the face of progressive intervention and inclusive practices, more restrictive placements are occurring for students with ED. It is hypothesized that an inability to meet the academic, emotional, and behavioral needs of students with ED accounts for the more restrictive placements (Gagnon & Leone, 2005). Lack of adequately trained teachers to be informed, preventive, and prescriptive adds to the higher rates of restrictive placements (Jerome et al., 2009). Teachers of students with ED who themselves have deficits in behavior management or social instruction can inadvertently lead to creating educational environments that are not ideal for students with ED (Shores & Wehby, 1999). Lewis and Sugai (1999) stated, "Unfortunately, evidence also suggests that current school discipline practices exacerbate and contribute to

children and youth's challenging behavior" (p. 2). Programs for students with ED may employ unsuccessful curricula for academics and for social instruction that do support growth in common ED deficit areas (Webber & Scheuerman, 1997). Programs for students with ED can fail to manage behaviors appropriately and rely on ineffective strategies. They may lower expectations instead of concentrating on teaching positive replacement behaviors (Shores & Wehby, 1999; Webber & Scheuerman, 1997). Also, evidence-based practices implemented with high fidelity are lacking for the audience of students with ED (Cook et al., 2003; Lewis et al., 2004). Lack of teacher training in the areas of curriculum, instruction, and positive behavior management causes work with individuals with ED to be ineffective (Cook et al., 2003; Webber & Scheuerman, 1997). Educational professionals have made calls for congruency and understanding among constituents and practitioners that would result in a unified effort to develop high quality programming for individuals with ED to assist overcoming program inadequacies and outcomes (Gage et al., 2010; Simpson et al., 2011).

In discussion of the historical background of students with ED and specialized educators, it is important to note the Council for Children with Behavior Disorders' (CCBD) Position Summary on Federal Policy on Disproportionality in Special Education (2013). This document provides recommendations regarding the disproportionality of service and identification in specialized education programs. The CCBD (2013) stated, "Special Education, guaranteeing the rights of students with disabilities to a free and appropriate public education, has been throughout its history a part of the struggle for civil rights" (p. 108). The earliest court cases and laws regarding antidiscrimination including the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the All Handicapped Children's Act (PL 94-142, 1975) were set in motion through concerns about ethnic and racial disproportionality in special education programming. IDEA of 1997 required

that states began to analyze and gauge racial disproportionalities within educational agencies (CCBD, 2013). When investigated, African American students were found to be identified at a disproportionate rate. Behavioral concerns were the primary rationale for referral (MacMillan et al., 1996). The disproportionality provisions of IDEA (2004) were brought about to address an overrepresentation of students of linguistically and culturally diverse populations for special education identification and correlating restrictive placements. African American students are overrepresented and placed in categories of cognitive impairment and emotional disabilities (CCBD, 2013). Cultural responsiveness issues and concerns in both general and special education have been persistently identified in the research as key factors to racial and ethnic inequities in special education identification (Garcia & Ortiz, 2004). The CCBD (2013) stated:

> Students with emotional and behavioral disabilities are at particular risk for being subjected to disproportionate practices in identification and placement. We believe that the recommended changes in monitoring and enforcement policy for the disproportionality provisions of IDEA will move special education policy in a direction consistent with those goals, and we offer our support and assistance to the department in all efforts to more effectively address, and ultimately eliminate, racial and ethnic disparities in special education. (p. 118)

These recommended changes by the CCBD (2013) are noted in the history and background of services and special education and for students with ED. Efforts to accommodate students with ED equitably have continued through recommendations and provisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Act and the CCBD.

Training and Licensure History

Changes in training and licensure in special education have occurred along with political

and educational schools of thought of the time. Brownell et al. (2010) stated, "Special education teacher preparation has evolved over the past 150 years, since special education teachers were first prepared in residential settings" (p. 357). Chapey et al. (1985) stated, "Historically, the United States has lacked consensus regarding teacher certification and teacher training in special education" (p. 203). Licensure types have navigated from categorical, non-categorical, integrated, and to alternative route licensures (Brownell et al., 2010, Chapey et al., 1985, Geiger et al., 2003). Brownell et al. (2010) stated, "Special education teacher preparation can be divided into the categorical, non-categorical, and integrated eras-each with its prevailing political contexts, findings from research, and assumptions about teacher quality" (p. 359). Special education teacher preparation programs have shifted due to the nature of teacher quality and of the profession itself. Brownell et al. (2010) stated, "Over the years, special education teacher education has been conceptualized differently as a result of differing influences affecting implicit teacher quality assumptions" (p. 359). The conceptualization of special education is dependent on many factors relevant at a moment in time.

The first delineated era in special education training and licensure was called the categorical era (Brownell et al., 2010, Geiger et al., 2003). Brownell et al. (2010) stated, "During the categorical era of special education teacher preparation, teachers were prepared to serve students with specific disabilities" (p. 359). The medical and psychological communities of the time provided the early conceptualization of the specific disability areas. Brownell et al. (2010) noted, "The categorical view was advanced by legislation that provided funding to universities for teacher preparation based on specific disability areas" (p. 359). Brownell et al. (2010) also noted, "States typically certified teachers by the disability category of students they taught" (p. 360). The ideology of college preparatory programs for teachers of special education assumed

that categorical ideologies regarding services stemmed from the premise that special education

teachers that had knowledge of the specific characteristics of students with various types of

disabilities would best serve those populations. Brownell et al. (2010) stated, "Ultimately, the

power and generality of behavioral techniques and teaching strategies generated through process-

product research undermined categorical thinking contributing to the rise of a non-categorical

era" (p. 361). Geiger et al. (2003) stated, "In the last 30 years there has been a clearly identifiable

shift from special education licensure models that were based solely on categories of disabilities

to models that retain categorical options and also offer non-categorical options" (p. 22). ED as a

categorical license continues in many jurisdictions.

Concerns regarding separating students based on a disability classification and emerging

research on effective general education models influenced and helped form the non-categorical

era (Brownell et al., 2010). Practices that focused on process-product pedagogy and behavioral

strategies garnered more effective strategies for special education teachers. The field was driven

in a non-categorical direction on service delivery methods and teacher preparation programs.

Geiger et al. (2003) stated, "A substantial majority of jurisdictions have adopted licensure

structures that include a mixture of categorical and non-categorical licensure options" (p. 25).

Curriculum-based measurement [CBM] and data collection strategies changed the way special

educators remediated student performance. Brownell et al. (2010) stated, "The idea is

remarkably simple: CBM provides a thermometer with which academic illness and recovery can

be detected" (p. 362). The need for a special educator to evaluate how effective intervention

strategies were became more essential than specific information about a particular disability area.

Brownell et al. (2010) stated, "The precise individualized focus of prescriptive teaching gave

way to instructional and management principles so powerful as to render individual prescription

unnecessary" (p. 362). Being an effective special education teacher in the non-categorical era included direct instruction, active engagement, lesson pacing, clear instructions, planned curriculum, and classroom management. Brownell et al. (2010) stated, "In the non-categorical era, effective teaching required mastery of generic instructional and classroom management skills" (p. 363). Behavior management techniques included the neutral withholding of reinforcement following a poor choice and the subsequent rewarding of positive behaviors or choices. Brownell et al. (2010) stated, "They used more sophisticated behavioral techniques like time out, differential reinforcement, and planned ignoring" (p. 363). Dissatisfaction with mechanical teaching and management led to examining more cognitive driven approaches. Brownell et al. (2010) stated, "Often teaching and management skills were taught in isolation and combined into more complex repertoires in the field settings" (p. 363). Examining cognitive approaches led to the era of integrated preparation. Geiger et al. (2003) stated, "The growth of non-categorical licensure options may provide jurisdictions and local education agencies with the flexibility needed to address chronic shortages of special education teachers" (p. 25). The change to non-categorical licensing is in part due to the fact that most special education licenses are in a generalized education platform versus a categorical area of special education (Mainzer & Horvath, 2001).

In the 1990s, the era of integrated preparation of general and special education teachers began (Brownell et al., 2010). A national interest in a shared responsibility for educating special education students arose. Brownell et al. (2010) stated, "Later in the decade, however, concern about the degree to which students with disabilities were being accommodated in general education environments and confusion about roles and responsibilities of general and special education teachers prompted calls for education reform" (p. 363). Reform strategies in the

integrated era were highly debated. Brownell et al. (2010) noted,

> The failure of research to establish indisputable and conclusive evidence of the efficacy of special education placements changed the nature of the argument from an empirical one to one with moral and ethical foundation. Thus, if children did not benefit from special education placements, how could separating them from their classmates be justified? (p. 364)

Issues regarding special education's effectiveness and moral implications solidified support for inclusion in the integrated preparation era. Brownell et al. (2010) stated, "Assumptions about special education teacher quality were rooted in ideology undergirding inclusion itself but were influenced as well by constructive notions of effective teaching (p. 364). Special educators provided knowledge of assessment and intervention to the collaborative process. Brownell et al. (2010) stated, "The complementary roles of classroom teachers and special educators provided impetus to the movements to educate them together" (p. 365).

Changes and movements continue to occur regarding training and licensure for special educators. Brownell et al. (2010) stated, "Special education service delivery and classroom practice has evolved in response to policy, research and school practice" (p. 365). Alternative routes to special education licensure have evolved nationally (Geiger et al., 2003). Rosenberg and Sindelar (2005) noted, "For decades, there simply have not been enough qualified teachers to address the educational needs of the growing numbers of students with disabilities" (p. 117). Rosenberg and Sindelar (2005) added, "Not surprisingly, alternative certification has become a growth industry" (p. 117). Concerns have arisen regarding the effectiveness of alternative certification routes (Rosenberg & Sindelar, 2005; Rosenberg et al., 2007; Wasburn-Moses & Rosenberg, 2008). "The great demand for special education teachers has transformed teacher

preparation and licensure into commodities and has spawned mass-market options before our knowledge of effective alternative route certification teacher preparation is usable" (Rosenberg & Sindelar, 2005, p. 205). Wasburn-Moses and Rosenberg (2008) stated, "With the ever increasing number of alternative route programs in special education, many teacher educators are responsible for delivering content to non-traditional learners under unfamiliar conditions" (p. 264).

A scarcity of information exists regarding specific training and licensure comparisons between teachers of ED. Limited research is available comparing the perception of preparedness to teach ED among teachers. Billingsley et al. (2006) stated, "We know little about the qualifications of teachers of students with ED, for example, how they compare with other special educators on critical variables such as certification, experience, and preparedness to teach" (p. 253). A higher number of ED teachers lacked full certification in their main teaching assignments in comparison to other types of special educators. Billingsley et al. (2006) noted,

> Our data suggest that teachers of students with ED are among the least qualified special educators. We found that an alarmingly high proportion of entering teachers of students with ED lacked basic certification for their main assignment, with some having only emergency certification or no certification at all. (p. 260)

This incongruence in preparation causes instability as ED teachers leave soon after entering the profession. Billingsley et al. (2006) stated, "Several areas of preservice preparation in teaching students with ED need improvement. About one third of respondents in the ED group indicated their preparation did not match the realities of their first year of teaching" (p. 201).

In 1972, Abeson and Fleury created the State Certification Requirements for Education of the Handicapped that included an alphabetical, state by state listing of each state's requirements

for certification. In Indiana, 24 credit hours were needed to hold a license in ED. Mandatory courses for an ED certification at that time included courses titled: Education of the Emotionally Disturbed and Psychology of the Emotionally Disturbed. The list of alternate courses supporting an ED certification included courses titles such as: Introduction to Exceptional Children, Education of Exceptional Children, Psychology of Exceptional Children, Counseling and Guidance for Students and Parents, Abnormal Psychology, Child Psychology, and Behavior Problems and Management. The Indiana Professional Standards Board was developed in the 1990s to guide Indiana teacher licensure. "In Indiana, the study commission that recommended the creation of the standards board had found that the rules governing the preparation and licensure of Indiana's educators was antiquated and confusing" (Scannell & Wain, 1996, p. 212). At that time, Indiana licensure was guided by the Indiana Professional Standards Board. Scannell and Wain (1996) stated, "The board and its support staff are responsible for approving preparation programs and issuing licenses for teachers, administrators, and school service personnel" (p. 211). The Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) currently utilizes the Rules for Educator Preparation and Accountability (REPA) for educator development and licensing (IDOE, 2018). The Advisory Board for Professional Standards approved Indiana's current licensing system titled REPA in 2010 (IDOE, 2018). The IDOE website lists assignment codes for areas of exceptionality with licensure requirements.

The terms Emotional Disability, Emotionally Disturbed, and Seriously Emotionally Handicapped are all listed as exceptionalities. Teachers with licensure in Emotional Disability, Emotionally Disturbed, Seriously Emotionally Handicapped, Mild Intervention, or Intense Intervention are all qualified to teach students with ED (IDOE, 2018).

Qualified Professionals

Training qualified professionals to work with students with ED in school has occurred

since the creation of the All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, but these professionals are in

short supply (Levine, 2015). Thornton et al. (2007) stated, "The shortage of special education

teachers is an epidemic and affects all regions of the United States" (p. 233). Cooley Nichols et

al. (2008) elaborately reviewed the special education teacher shortage by stating:

> Legislative changes since 1983 have also exacerbated the shortage of special educators.
>
> The 1997 and 2004 amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
>
> (IDEA) and the 2002 implementation of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act have
>
> combined to make the shortages even worse. The reauthorization of IDEA both increased
>
> the number of individuals eligible to receive special services and extended the range of
>
> services available. NCLB put in place new guidelines governing accountability for
>
> students and teachers, as well as new definitions of highly qualified teachers that
>
> required, among other things, that teachers be licensed in their areas of instruction. For
>
> special education, this posed confusing problems. (p. 599)

Cooley Nichols et al. (2008) also stated, "Our failure to address these issues, which *A Nation at*

Risk alluded to a quarter of a century ago, will mean that the most vulnerable individuals,

children with special needs, are the ones who are likely to suffer most" (p. 600).

Qualified professionals need to be available and they need to have skilled training so they

can meet the specific needs of ED students. Gable et al. (2012) stated, "One way to provide the

quality of education is to ensure that all teachers of students identified as ED possess knowledge

and skills required to address the myriad challenges associated with this difficult population of

students" (p. 501). Simpson et al. (2011) stated, "Other effective practice elemental components

include (a) environmental supports, (b) behavior management systems, (c) social skill and social interpretation training and social interaction programs, (d) learning and academic support methods, (e) parent and family involvement programs, and (f) community supports" (p. 234). Study results by Gable et al. noted a current need to prepare teachers in social, academic, and behavioral skills to support students with ED. Demonstrated through research, outcomes for students with ED can be augmented and supported through interventions that are positive, flexible, collaborative, culturally sensitive, and sustainable (Gardner & Frazier-Trotman, 2001; Van Acker, 2003). It is crucial that these types of interventions be intentional in delivery by competent, well trained, and supportive educators (Gardner et al. 2001; Van Acker, 2003).

A need for qualified professional teachers of ED persists. Cook et al. (2003) noted that poor results are not extraordinary if educators working as ED teachers report lack of essential training and preparation. Walker et al. (2013) stated, "To improve student outcomes, it appears that we must continue to explore strategies to help frontline professionals better translate research into practice, so they can implement effective programs and interventions to better support students with EBD [sic]" (p. 3). Leko et al. (2015) stated, "Teacher preparation programs need some way of focusing on the essential content and instructional practice of effective special education teaching" (p. 29). Leko et al. (2015) also noted,

> Reforming special education initial preparation (or any individual entity) in isolation is unlikely to result in any meaningful progress. Productive reform efforts will hinge on special education leaders being present at the policy table and in positions of leadership and influence. (p. 39)

Gable et al. (2012) stated, "There is little current information on the knowledge and skill level of special educators or general educators who work with students with ED" (p. 501). Gable et al.

(2012) stated, "Clearly, fundamental changes in initial teacher preparation and subsequent support are necessary if either special educators or general educators are to meet the academic and nonacademic needs of students with ED" (p. 515). Overall, there is limited literature on the perception of teachers of ED on their level of preparedness as it relates to qualification in the field of ED.

Classroom Environmental Supports

Classroom environment is considered a key element in teacher training for students with ED by Simpson et al. (2011). As early as 1936, psychologist Kurt Lewin described, "Every scientific psychology must take into account whole situations, i.e. the state of both person and environment" (p. 12). Sommer (2009) stated, "The classroom itself is the most immediate accessible environment problem" (p. 175). Souders (2015) discussed that a structured classroom is a support for students with ED. Oliver and Koustouros (2014) suggested that as students enter the classroom the positioning of desks and classroom structure sets the tone for the classroom. Fernandes et al. (2011) discussed the rationale for a variety of seating arrangements in a classroom. Fernandes et al. (2011) stated, "Seating arrangements themselves create various dynamics within the classroom. The actual seating arrangement can influence student control in the classroom" (p. 70). A lack of studies exists pertaining to the topic of seating arrangements and physical order in the classroom for students with ED. Limited literature exists on the perception of teachers of ED on their level of preparedness as it relates to physical classroom layout, structure, and preparedness to understand the impact of classroom environment.

Behavioral Management Plans

In many classrooms students with ED may demonstrate negative behaviors such as physical aggression, verbal outbursts, disruptions, and acting-out behaviors not conducive in the

classroom setting (Kerr & Nelson, 2010; Simpson et al., 2011). Gable et al. (2012) stated, "Data suggest that the aberrant behavior of students with ED adversely affects not only their academic achievement and social relationships, but also their post-secondary adjustment" (p. 500). Responsive techniques in classroom management need to be based on theory and best practice strategies (Ficarra & Quinn, 2014). Effective behavior management planning is considered a key element in teacher training for ED by Simpson et al. (2011). In addition to noting that classroom management is a critical skill area and that teacher training should include successful, evidence-based strategies, the authors stated:

> Our literature search resulted in identification of 20 general practices that met the criteria for evidence based. These practices were grouped into five empirically-supported, critical features of effective classroom management: (a) maximize structure; (b) post, teach, review, monitor, and reinforce expectations; (c) actively engage students in observable ways; (d) use a continuum of strategies for responding to appropriate behaviors; and (e) use a continuum of strategies to respond to inappropriate behaviors. (Simonson et al., 2008, p. 3)

Specific discussion about increasing desired behaviors included strategies such as using tangible token economies, group and individual behavior contracts, group and individual reinforcement, and contingent praise. Simonson et al. (2008) also discussed strategies for decreasing undesired behaviors which included specific time out from reinforcement, response-cost, performance feedback, and planned ignoring. Gandzhina and Cotton (2015) discussed overall classroom management techniques including strategies based on Lee Canter's (2009) book *Assertive Discipline* and Harry and Rosemary Wong's 2009 book, *The First Days of School*: *How to be an Effective Teacher.* Gandzhina and Cotton (2015) stated, "Applying these

techniques on a daily basis will positively influence classroom learning" (p. 41). Ficarra and Quinn (2014) discussed evidence-based behavior management specific to teaching training. Ficarra and Quinn (2014) stated, "Classroom management techniques need to be responsive as well as reflect best practice and theory" (p. 72). Ficarra and Quinn demonstrated that teachers fully certified in special education had higher ratings in base of knowledge and in classroom competence when compared to teachers that were not certified in special education specifically in the following areas: maximizing structure, general strategies, and number of techniques to support the student in the classroom.

> Learning how to manage a classroom effectively is a difficult task for preservice teachers. The reasons for the difficulty lie in the lack of attention to the field by the profession, lack of formal preparation in the field by most teachers, and the lack of reality-based pedagogy in many teacher education classrooms. (Eisenman et al., 2015, p. 1)

Similar to the critical factors described by Simonson et al. (2008), Ficarra and Quinn (2014) noted five critical elements relating to behavior management:

> The five critical elements of evidence-based classroom management are: 1) maximizing structure, 2) posting, teaching, reviewing, monitoring, and reinforcing expectations, 3) engaging students actively in observable ways, 4) using a continuum of strategies to acknowledge appropriate behavior, 5) employing a variety of techniques to respond to inappropriate behavior. (p. 72)

> Oliver and Reschly (2010) wrote specifically about teacher training in behavior management, "Adequate special education teacher preparation and strong classroom organization and behavior management skills are critical for teachers of EBD [*sic*]" (p. 188). Oliver and Reschly (2010) clearly outlined features of effective management:

Teachers were identified as effective classroom managers if they (a) had clear

expectations about behavior and communicated them clearly; (b) explicitly taught

classroom rules and routines using examples and non-examples; (c) acknowledged

students for appropriate behavior using behavior-specific praise; (d) provided quick,

prompt responses to inappropriate behavior before behaviors escalated; and (e) were

consistent with consequences to both appropriate and inappropriate behavior. (p. 190)

Ficarra and Quinn (2014) stated,

It is imperative that teacher preparation programs provide coordinated coursework and

fieldwork experiences through which teachers can be prepared in evidence-based

classroom management skills and provided with a foundation to access future

opportunities to apply and enhance skills in this important domain via in-service sources.

(p. 83)

Three overarching schools of thought regarding behavioral programing have been described:

For example, Jones' (1987) *Classroom Discipline* can be classified as an interventionist

model in that it is neo-Skinnerian and assumes that children need to be externally

controlled in order to learn to behave appropriately, while Gordon's *Teacher*

Effectiveness Training (1974), can be classified as a non-interventionist approach to

classroom management as it assumes that students are self-regulating and thus can learn

to manage their own behavior. Gathercoal's (1990) *Judicious Discipline* is an example of

an internationalist approach in that it focuses both on how teachers create behavior

systems in the classroom and how to involve students in creating classroom rules and

regulating their personal behavior. (Stough et al., 2015, p. 38)

Stough et al. (2015) noted that novice special education teachers similarly report that

despite college training they were not prepared adequately for their classroom assignments. Begeny and Martens (2006) stated, "Despite the demonstrated effectiveness of behavioral instruction practices, it is unclear to what extent teachers are trained in these methods or given adequate opportunities to practice these skills with supervision" (p. 264). While many programs are available to support academic pedagogy, Eisenman et al. (2015) noted that there was a lack of support for behavior management:

> There is comparatively little scholarship dedicated to classroom management issues, no graduate programs, professional organizations, national conferences, or journals focused on classroom management. This lack of focus has put classroom management at the low end of priorities and pedagogical innovation. (p. 2)

Oliver and Reschly (2010) discussed that thorough classroom organization and solid behavior management skills need to be taught during teacher preparation to support students with ED. A lack of available literature exists on the perception of teachers of ED on their level of preparedness as it relates to behavior management. Ficarra and Quinn (2014) stated, "Little research has been conducted to determine the extent to which special education teacher preparation programs provide teachers with adequate instruction on classroom organization and management techniques" (p. 188).

Social Skills Training

Students with ED demonstrate inadequacies in social skills, and definitive instruction and support in social skills are critical (Simpson et al., 2011). Wiley et al. (2009) stated,

> Excesses in problem behavior and deficits in social skills place students with ED at a uniquely high risk for a host of negative developmental outcomes, including school failure, relationship problems, drug and alcohol abuse, involvement with the criminal

justice system, unemployment, poor community adjustment, and mental health problems as adults. These harmful outcomes impact not only the students with ED, but also their families, schools, communities, and society as a whole. (p. 451)

Miller et al. (2005) stated,

Because the consequences of poor social behavior can be, and oftentimes are, dramatic, researchers continue to explore the causes of antisocial behavior, strategies for preventing such behavior problems, and the effective intervention practices for students, including those with high incidence disabilities, who lack the requisite social skills to be deemed socially competent by relevant judges (e.g., peers, teachers, and parents). (p. 27)

Simpson et al. (2011) noted, "In a fashion parallel to having an effective behavior management and behavior support system, we consider ongoing social skills and social interaction training to be an essential feature of an effective EBD [sic] program" (p. 236). ED students need to have a general knowledge of appropriate social skills required in academic and nonacademic settings to be successful (Kern & State, 2009; Lewis et al., 2004; Simpson et al., 2011). Simpson et al. (2011) outlined three factors for social skills gains:

First, there is the need that social interventions be carefully crafted to match desired social outcomes and individual circumstances. Second, interventions must be appropriately calibrated according to the severity and complexity of the behaviors being targeted for change. Finally, significant time and effort must be devoted to social skill instruction, including opportunities for practice in natural setting. (p. 237)

Gresham (1998) remarked that the most effective social skills training consisted of direct teaching of face to face skills involving modeling, coaching, and reinforcement. Gresham found the most critical skill was modeling desired behaviors. Coaching is an effective strategy that

relies on verbal step by step instruction. Three parameters guide social coaching which includes rule presentation, practice, and verbal feedback on behavior outcome (Elliott & Gresham, 1991). Coaching has a positive impact with students that respond to verbal instructions and guidance. Elliott and Gresham (1991) also noted praise specifically tied to a positive behavioral response is supportive in the learned skill acquisition. Narrative reviews of social skills training suggest that combined strategies of modeling, coaching, and paired reinforcement are effective.

In a study by Lane et al. (2004), five critical social skills that yielded classroom success were identified by teachers:

Five skills: (a) follows directions, (b) attends to your instructions, (c) controls temper in conflict situations with peers, (d) controls conflict situations with adults, (e) responds appropriately to physical aggression from peers, were rated as essential for classroom success by teachers representing all three levels. (p. 421)

In discussion of socio-emotional learning principles, Adams (2013) stated:

Social-emotional development is an important component of special education programs and the general education schools that feed them. Policy decisions should reflect an understanding of the extent to which deficiencies in the social-emotional domain are common to many students receiving special education services. This suggests the need for explicit instruction and supports regarding these skills before students reach a special education program; and the importance of this only accelerates after they are placed. Additionally, the needs of special education students require added intensity, coordination, and consistency in social-emotional skills development efforts. (p. 116)

Wiley et al. (2009) found when students with ED were evaluated for social skills, they were found to be in the low average range regardless of the performance level of the school in which they were enrolled. Miller et al. (2005) provided some preliminary evidence that self-contained classrooms that provided elementary-aged students social skill instruction demonstrated decreased inappropriate behaviors and increases in engagement in academics. Simpson et al. (2011) discussed essential features for programs for students with ED noting valid social skills as a critical feature. A lack of information in the literature exists pertaining to the perception of teachers of ED on their level of preparedness as it relates to teaching social skills and social skill interventions.

Recommended Research

Simpson et al. (2011) discussed ED students and the need to embed critical educational components, "Effective and research-based practices are of great significance; however, attainment of positive outcomes by students with EBD [sic] will occur only when these methods are used appropriately by knowledgeable, skilled, and committed professionals and support staff" (p. 239). Further research on key effective and research-based practices for teaching and pre-service training for ED needs to be conducted. Researching and understanding the disparate number of minority eligibility for ED is also necessary. The Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders (2013) stated, "Students with emotional and behavioral disabilities are at particular risk for being subjected to disproportionate practices in identification and placement" (p. 120). Oliver and Reschly (2010) noted two areas that could benefit from future research. One area of research revolved around preparation of special education teachers and their familiarity with classroom management. The second area of research described organizational strategies paired with behavior management. Further, with nationwide evolvement of RTI and PBIS teams,

attention is being focused on non-academic as well as academic success (Upreti et al., 2010).

Research on strategies and best practice techniques for RTI and PBIS teams to utilize for

behavior and socio-emotional skill building would be substantial. Additional research on trauma

and its effect on students' social-emotional health is critical. Anderson et al. (2015) stated,

"Trauma-informed practices include social-emotional development and problem-solving skills

that classroom staff are in an optimal position to facilitate" (p. 114). Anderson et al. also stated:

> Schools are asking for help from university social work and teacher education faculty to
>
> help them better support children's cognitive and social-emotional development.
>
> Incorporating trauma-informed approaches in school settings is crucial to meet the needs
>
> of children who have been exposed to multiple adverse experiences. (p. 132)

Research on level of perceived preparedness to teach ED could yield light on gaps in

special education teacher preparation. The research information could guide teacher training and

preparation to support the unique needs of students identified as ED. Moustakas (1994) noted,

"In a broad sense, that which appears provides the impetus for experience and for generating

knowledge" (p. 26). Generating knowledge and understanding of the lived experiences of those

teaching ED needs to be researched and analyzed to guide pre-service training of teachers

preparing to teach ED and to support teachers currently teaching students with ED.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Many educational researchers have recorded and analyzed the poor short- and long-term outcomes of students with ED over the past 30 years (Bullock & Gable, 2006; Levine, 2015). Knitzer and Olsen (1982) noted only one-third of children impacted by emotional disabilities received services due to a lack of provisions and placement continuums for their disability. This qualitative phenomenological research study focused on comparing the perceived level of preparedness of teachers holding a mild intervention license to teach ED with the perceived level of preparedness of teachers holding an ED license to teach ED.

Data primarily drew from interviews with individual participants who share the lived experience of teaching ED. Since little is known about the perception of level of preparedness to teach students with ED, a qualitative methodology was chosen. Qualitative research allows the researcher a deeper understanding of the lived experience of individuals. Moustakas (1994) noted, "In a broad sense, that which appears provides the impetus for experience and for generating knowledge" (p. 26).

To generate knowledge and to garner more information about the actual lived experiences of teachers of ED, a phenomenological qualitative research method was chosen. Wertz (2011) noted, "Qualitative methods have been successfully introduced in applied areas such as counseling, and educational and industrial psychology, where a

holistic and contextual understanding of the individual's first-person experience

facilitates effective problem solving" (p. 88). In phenomenological research, the

investigator enters into an understanding of the true lived experiences of others by

leaving behind their preconceived ideas of how things should be perceived (Wertz, 2011).

The researcher gathers data, usually through interviews, and reflects on meanings and

subjective realities of the phenomena under consideration. "The phenomenon is

perceived and described in its totality, in a fresh and open way" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34).

Phenomenological research assumes that although there is an objective reality, it is only

made meaningful through interaction with the human perception. A portrait of the lived

experiences is constructed by the researcher by finding true meaning within the data by a

process of thorough reflection and review. A theoretical base of phenomenology guided

the research and the lived experience of teachers of ED.

Methodology and Design

A phenomenological qualitative research method was chosen to learn more about the

actual lived experiences of teachers with mild intervention licenses and teachers with ED

licenses who teach students with ED. Creswell (2007) noted, "A phenomenology provides a deep

understanding of a phenomenon as experienced by several individuals" (p. 82). A qualitative

phenomenological study of teachers' perceptions of preparedness to teach ED was conducted.

Data were primarily drawn from interviews with individual participants. The first interview

involved using specific questions to be used to facilitate analysis of the seven key element areas

as described by Simpson et al. (2011) and aid in the discussion of perception of preparedness in

each of the element areas. Simpson et al. stated, "Other effective practice elemental components

include (a) environmental supports, (b) behavior management systems, (c) social skill and social

interpretation training and social interaction programs, (d) learning and academic support methods, (e) parent and family involvement programs, and (f) community supports" (p. 234). The second interview presented open-ended questions to learn more of the teachers' perceptions of preparedness to teach ED and final thoughts on level of preparedness. Teacher participants were interviewed and audio recorded. The recorded sessions were transcribed, coded, and analyzed. Data were analyzed using Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenology method. Phenomenological analysis of data was divided into three stages based on the transcendental phenomenological method including phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis of meaning and essences. The research design was examined for purposeful construct, fidelity, and confidentiality.

Research Questions

This phenomenological study involved teachers who have experienced teaching ED and their individual perception of preparedness to work with ED students. There were three key research questions for the dissertation. The first research question was, "What are the perceptions of teachers with a mild intervention license about how well prepared they were for teaching ED?" The second research question was, "How do the perceptions of teachers with a mild intervention license contrast with the perceptions of ED licensed teachers in regard to preparedness to teach ED?" The third research question was, "What are the possible implications for the preparation of special education teachers of the emotionally disabled?" The questions were designed to yield a deep understanding of the phenomenon as experienced by each individual teacher. The broad level research question is, "Are there differences in the perceived level of preparation to teach students with emotional disabilities between licensure requirements

for teachers of ED?"

Participants

The first group of participants included five teachers having a mild intervention license who had taught in a self-contained classroom or resource room including students with ED. The second group of participants included five teachers having an ED license who had taught in a self-contained classroom or resource classroom including students with ED. Eligible contact information was obtained by emailing directors of special education in Indiana asking permission to receive contact information for eligible teacher candidates. The requirements for participation in the study were noted in the email to special education cooperative directors. Teacher participants were recruited by email sent by me to the teacher candidates that service ED students. The requirements for the study were communicated to any prospective teacher candidate. Teachers interested in taking part in the study were asked to sign an appropriate informed consent document and relay their contact information to the researcher.

To participate in the study, teachers met the following requirements:

- Teacher participants must currently be teaching in a self-contained classroom or resource classroom servicing students with emotional disabilities (not exclusively).

- Teacher participants must self-identify that they have a mild intervention license or an ED license.

- Teacher participants must commit to two interviews with the researcher who will provide a clear understanding that audio recording and note taking will be utilized in the process of validly collecting information about the lived experience of the teacher candidates.

- Teacher participants must sign an informed consent form which denotes an understanding that information will be securely and confidentially maintained for three years; however, total anonymity cannot be guaranteed especially when electronic data capture is utilized.

Five teachers having a mild intervention license were selected from the pool of teachers having a mild intervention license. Five teachers having an ED license were selected from the pool of teachers having an ED license. I reviewed all qualified candidates and selected a balanced representation of candidates that share the lived experience of teaching ED in the state. Interviews took place at any location of the candidates' choosing within their school building that was free from distraction or interference for the genuine interview process. In phenomenological research, a homogeneous sample is critical to the outcome of the analysis (Moustakas, 1994). Variances in candidates were scrutinized in an attempt to yield a homogeneous sample to support a trustworthy phenomenological analysis.

Variables

The phenomenon analyzed was the actual lived experience of teachers of ED and their perceptions of level of preparedness to teach ED. A key variable was the difference in licensure that enabled the current participants to teach ED. The first group of participants included five teachers having a mild intervention license who have taught in a self-contained classroom or resource room including students with ED. The second group of participants included five teachers having an ED license who have taught in a self-contained classroom or resource classroom including students with ED.

Instrumentation

Information derived from the phenomenological study will be primarily drawn from

interviews with individual participants. I designed and implemented the research questions for the interviews. Two interviews were conducted of each participant in the study. Each interview was 60 to 90 minutes in length. The first interview consisted of seven interview questions and the second interview included two questions.

Procedures

Teachers were asked to participate in two interviews. I scheduled the first interview, then scheduled the second interview within one month of the first interview. Participants had prior understanding from the consent instrument that interviews were to be audio recorded with simultaneous pencil/paper note taking during the interview session.

The first interview specifically dealt with interviewing participants about their perceived level of preparation to teach ED in the seven essential elements for programming for emotional and behavioral disorders as described by Simpson et al. (2011). Simpson et al. (2011) stated,

> Other effective practice elemental components include (a) environmental supports, (b) behavior management systems, (c) social skill and social interpretation training and social interaction programs, (d) learning and academic support methods, (e) parent and family involvement programs, and (f) community supports. (p. 234)

A thorough reflection of participants' lived experience regarding these critical elements and their perception of their own level of preparedness to support these elements were sought through the phenomenological study. A second interview was confirmed at the exit of the first interview. A brief overview of the first interview was provided for the participants so they can more thoroughly process their responses prior to the second interview.

The second and final interview began with a review of the transcript from the first interview. Any desired additions to provide the most trustworthy interview findings were

completed during the concluding thoughts portion of the interview. In the final interview I allowed the participant to share concluding thoughts on their perception of level of preparedness to teach ED. An open-ended question was asked regarding what three preparatory elements would be of highest importance in preparing to teach ED students. A review of all responses was concluded at this final interview. The final transcript was made available upon request in lieu of being the last interview. Copies of the final product of the research will be sent to participants upon request.

Interviews conducted in the phenomenological study were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. Data were analyzed using Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenology method. Phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis of meanings and essences are the three stages used in the analysis of the interviews (Moustakas, 1994).

Moustakas (1994) stated, "*Epoche* is the Greek word meaning to refrain from judgment, to abstain from or stay away from the everyday" (p. 33). In transcendental phenomenology, the researcher strives to be in a state of *epoche* prior to beginning the first stage which is phenomenological reduction. During the process of phenomenological reduction, it is critical for the researcher to adopt a posture of wonder and put aside any preconceived or biased ideas of what the participant's experience might entail. The researcher during the phenomenological reduction stage looks for unique characteristics and observable information that defines the phenomena. Moustakas (1994) stated,

> In Phenomenological Reduction, the task is that of describing in textural language just what one sees, not only in terms of the external object, but also the internal act of consciousness, the experience as such, the rhythm and relationship between the phenomenon and self. (p. 99)

This process sets the stage for the next stage in the process which is imaginative variation.

Moustakas (1994) stated,

The task of imaginative variation is to seek possible meanings through the utilization of the imagination, varying the frames of reference, employing polarities and reversals, and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives, different positions, roles or functions. (p. 98)

Understanding the "how" and the "what" of the experience is the aim of the Imaginative Variation. There are four steps of imaginative variation:

Systematic varying of the possible structural meanings that underlie the textural meanings; Recognizing the underlying themes or contexts that account for the emergence of the phenomenon; Considering the universal structures that precipitate feelings and thoughts with reference to the phenomenon, such as the structure of time, space, bodily concerns, materiality, causality, relation to self, or relation to others; Searching for exemplifications that vividly illustrate the invariant structural themes and facilitates the development of a structural description of the phenomenon. (Moustakas, 1994, p. 99)

For each experience a participant shared, I wrote a structural description of the experience based on the steps of imaginative variation. Utilizing imaginative variation led me to the third stage in the process which is synthesis of meanings and essences as derived through the lived and shared experiences of the participants.

Moustakas (1994) stated, "The final step in the phenomenological research process is the intuitive integration of the fundamental textural and structural descriptions into a unified statement of the essences of the experiences of the phenomenon as a whole" (Moustakas, 1994,

p. 100). Utilizing all three stages provided me with a rich and thorough understanding of the phenomenon at that particular place and time that the experiences are shared and analyzed.

Trustworthiness, Consistency, Validity, and Reliability

Biklen and Bogdan (2007) noted, "Qualitative researchers tend to view reliability as a fit between what they record as data and what actually occurs in the setting under study, rather than the literal consistency across different observations" (p. 40). In this study, the concepts of trustworthiness, consistency, reliability, and validity are employed to ensure the knowledge and understanding of the lived experiences of those being asked to teach ED is reflected in the research. Moustakas (1994) stated,

> The researcher following a transcendental phenomenological approach engages in disciplined and systematic efforts to set aside prejudgments regarding the phenomenon being investigated (known as the *Epoche* process) in order to launch the study as far as possible free of preconceptions, beliefs, and knowledge of the phenomenon from prior experiences and professional studies—to be completely open, receptive, and naïve in listening and hearing research participants describe their experience of the phenomenon being investigated. (p. 22)

As well as engaging in disciplined and systematic efforts in research, Creswell (2007) noted, "When qualitative researchers locate evidence to document a code or theme in different sources of data, they are triangulating information and providing validity to their findings" (p. 251). Brod et al. (2009) stated, "It is essential to the task of evaluating content validity that the process be transparent and well documented for both scientific and regulatory purposes" (p. 1276). Specific criteria and standards are recommended in using the transcendental phenomenological approach. Brod et al. (2009) also noted, "Qualitative research to establish and support content validity

should have a strong and documentable scientific basis and be conducted with the rigor required of all robust research" (p. 1277). Creswell (2007) stated, "A phenomenology ends with a descriptive passage that discusses the essence of the experience for individuals incorporating what they have experienced and how they experienced it. The essence is the culminating aspect of a phenomenological study" (p. 79).

Trustworthiness, consistency, validity, and reliability were supported during the study as I utilized guidelines suited for transcendental phenomenological research. "Reliability can be enhanced if the researcher obtains detailed field notes by employing a good quality tape for recording and by transcribing the tape" (Creswell, 2007, p. 253). When the researcher utilizes the strategies and tools involved in a true transcendental phenomenological study, the result will yield an amalgamation of the shared truths of the participants.

Summary

This qualitative phenomenological research study focused on comparing the perceived level of preparation of teachers with mild intervention licenses who teach ED, with the perceived level of preparation of teachers with ED licenses who teach ED. There were three key research questions that were designed to yield a deep understanding of the phenomenon as experienced by the teacher interview candidates. The first group of participants included five teachers of ED with a mild intervention license from a self-contained classroom or resource classroom. The second group of participants included five teachers of ED with an ED license from a self-contained classroom or resource classroom. Variance in licensure was recognized and noted. Instrumentation was primarily based upon semi-structured audio-recorded interviews and note taking.

Two interviews were conducted with each participant in the study. Participants were asked to review the transcripts from the first interview and make any additions to provide the most trustworthy interview findings. Any desired additions were completed during the concluding thoughts portion of the second interview. Interviews conducted in the phenomenological study were recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed. Data were analyzed using Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenology method. Trustworthiness and consistency were supported during the study as I utilized guidelines suited for transcendental phenomenological research. Moustakas (1994) noted, "In a broad sense, that which appears provides the impetus for experience and for generating knowledge" (p. 26). The information garnered from the research is hoped to have generated trustworthy knowledge that can facilitate new foundations for teacher training that supports students with ED.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Chapter 4 will offer a summary and analysis based upon the qualitative interviews with the teacher candidates. A brief background description of each participant is followed by the participant's individual textual and structural narratives. Interviews of teacher candidates with a mild intervention license are summarized and analyzed first, followed by interviews of teacher candidates with an ED license. Anna, Cara, Jess, Heidi, and Toni were the candidates with a mild intervention license. Wanda, Missy, Rhonda, Cindy, and Michael were the interview candidates with an ED license. Composite textual and structural descriptions are provided. Textural-structural synthesis findings from interviews are provided. An overall essence statement culminates Chapter 4 and endeavors to answer the primary research question as outlined in Chapter 1, which was, "Are there differences in the perception of preparedness to teach students with emotional disabilities between teachers having an ED license and teachers with a mild intervention license?"

Interviews With Teacher Candidates With a Mild Intervention License

Textural Description: Anna

Anna is a teacher of students with ED in a self-contained high school classroom that services students with ED and other conditions. Anna has taught students with ED for 7 years. Anna holds a mild intervention license.

Perceived Preparedness Regarding the Critical Element Areas

Anna described her study background as being primarily in elementary education. When asked about environmental supports, Anna shared that desk placement and proximity were discussed in the elementary education program. She shared that in the special education intervention courses that environment, desk placement, and proximity were not discussed. She stated, "So the things I've learned environmentally with my classroom especially with the ED population has [*sic*] been through trial and error." In the classroom Anna described changing the seating from groupings and paired pods to aligning the desks in a typical classroom fashion. Regarding desk placement she stated, "I was better able to control the students and be able to get through lessons." Anna described having a special education professor that offered firsthand experience on behavior management. Anna stated, "She really stressed to us that a behavior is not typically a behavior, it is a frustration." She described that using this lens has helped her focus on the source of frustration and finding a solution. Anna discussed that behavior consultants were provided by the special education cooperative and could be contacted for support. When asked about social skills preparation, Anna stated, "There wasn't anything that was like an aha moment when it came to social skills." She went on to add that the cooperative likes her to teach social skills. She stated, "There is no curriculum whatsoever." She said the curriculum must be made up by the classroom teacher. Anna described a special education professor that guided her to create binders of resource materials for a variety of remediation skills and problem-solving techniques. Anna stated, "I thought there was no way I would ever pull that binder out." She laughed and added, "But I tell you what, those binders are still in my classroom and if I'm having a day where I'm like I don't know what to do, I reach for my

binders." Anna discussed a special education course on parent and family involvement. Anna coined it, "Relationships 101". She stated, "If you can buy the parents in you can buy the students in." Anna described receiving emails, phone calls, and texts from parents. She stated, "So, I take a lot of time with my parental involvement and even if a parent is not involved I kind of force myself into making them more involved." In discussion of community supports, Anna shared that it was not a subject that they discussed. She felt what she had learned about community supports she had learned through her own research. In discussion of qualified professionals to teach ED, Anna stated, "Even though I have a mild interventionist background and we do have one class on emotional disabilities, that one class was no way to prepare for what you are going to see or for what you're going to encounter." Anna stated, "You have to celebrate success." She discussed having a support system. She also discussed first year growing pains. Anna's voice broke as she shared,

> "They come in and they can cuss you out. And that has nothing to do with you. And if you can't move past that, and you can't see beyond them coming in and taking their anger out on you, then, you're not right for the job."

> Anna said, more quietly, "I don't think there's any class that can prepare you, you either

have it and you have the grit to fit in, to bear it, or you don't." She added, "And if you don't, then you've got to move out of the way and let somebody else get in there because it's doing nothing but hurting the kids even more."

Three Preparatory Elements Considered of Highest Importance

Anna shared she had thought deeply about the first interview. She said, "Well, one thing that I think would be very good is to have a practicum in an ED room." She discussed that

without the stories from her professor regarding students with ED, she would have been

unprepared. Anna stated,

> If you can't experience that, or have a teacher that talks about that, then the first time you
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> get cussed out, it's written all over your face. If you don't know how to hide those
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> emotions, and I know this sounds horrible to say, but they'll get eaten alive. They will
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> pick up on them, and they will prey on you. So, having some exposure already in the
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> practical world would be great.

She added that role playing, and behavior management scenarios should be part of the

preparation. She stated, "First and foremost, the behavior has to be dealt with. If you sweep it

under the rug, it's always going to rear its head." Anna went on to share that parental and family

involvement was also key. She stated, "When you get behaviors under control and you have the

family working with you, everything else falls in line, they want to work with you, they want to

succeed for you and for themselves." Anna felt that the third preparatory element of highest

importance was social skills.

Structural Description: Anna

Perceived Preparedness Regarding the Critical Element Areas

Anna was eager and passionate about her role as we interviewed. Anna shared that her

special education courses seemed crucial and beneficial to her. Anna modeled her classroom

environment on the typical classroom set up for her high schoolers and felt she could better

control behavior this way. Regarding behavior management, she discussed that hearing stories

from her professor based on firsthand experiences was helpful. Being taught to find the

frustration behind the behavior as described by one professor seems to have guided her approach

to understanding her students with emotional disabilities. Anna felt strongly that once behavior is

under control, that other elements fall into place. Anna refers to and utilizes the practical academic remediation tools that she compiled into binders for her special education course. She stressed that with many needs and skill levels in her classroom the binders were greatly beneficial to her. Anna felt family involvement was deeply connected to student success and that as a teacher she needed to support parent 'buy in' to support student 'buy in.' Community supports was not an element that Anna remembers learning about to support students with ED. A qualified professional in Anna's eyes was someone that not only had the college courses and degree, but an ability to have empathy and patience with a body of students that needed someone to see their source of frustration and why they acted out behaviorally. That professional also must have the perseverance to understand that the projected negative behavior from students has nothing to do with them.

Three Preparatory Elements Considered of Highest Importance

Anna shared that she had thought about this question earnestly since the first interview. She felt that behavior management ranked first and must be taught. She felt that all other elements fall into place when student behavior is under control. Her vision of behavior management training included behavior scenarios, roleplaying, and actual experiences such as a practicum in an ED classroom. The second preparatory element Anna highlighted was parent and family involvement. She understood that when student and family work in unison the goal of success is more likely achieved. The third preparatory element was social skills. She felt this lifelong skill supports students in all environments. Being exposed to how to create social skills curriculum and exploring social skills curriculum would be a valuable preparatory experience.

Textural Description: Cara

Cara is a teacher at a combined middle and high school in a resource classroom that

services students with ED and other conditions. Cara has taught students with ED for 4 years. Cara holds a mild intervention license.

Perceived Preparedness Regarding the Critical Element Areas

Cara described her classroom resource room environment as family oriented. She said, "I've learned in college that like when working with, you know, special education students as a whole that like having different flexible seating options is good." She discussed a large family style table and seating options. She shared that you "tweak" what you learn to accommodate the student. Cara also relayed that a behavioral support room was available for the students. Regarding preparedness for behavior management, Cara stated, "I was not necessarily prepared for what I was getting myself into." She described learning how to create a Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) and a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) in college. She added, "When it came to dealing with the behaviors on a daily basis, and how to best support my kids, I would say I was not necessarily as prepared as I could have been." She added that she was not prepared to be a mother figure in the classroom. The topic of social skills preparation led to a discussion about social emotional learning and needs. Cara stated, "I really think that in college we didn't necessarily learn a lot about social skills." She reflected that at the time she did not realize how much developing social skills would play into her role of teacher of students with ED. She felt that professional development opportunities and her personal researching had helped her gain prowess in the area of social skills. Cara discussed her academic preparation in terms of supports provided during academic sessions. She shared that you learn about options and your role as teacher of record in college. In the classroom she felt student academics were supported by behavioral consultants and teaching assistants that could go into various academic classrooms. She shared her students have these supports available every day. She stated, "It just

can't be a one-woman job." Cara stated regarding academics, "Implementing those things and how to run it correctly so it's successful, that has been a total learning curve and kind of 'go with the flow' trial and error thing." The topic of parent and family involvement was introduced next. Cara stated, "I would have to say that was one of my biggest takeaways from college." She stated she was very prepared for communicating with families and "ensuring that my families do know what is going on." She described the student families as her families and that they were on the same "team." Cara stated, "We're all just one big family, like we have to work together to get these kids across the stage and to get them prepared for their life outside of the school." In regard to community supports, Cara stated, "I would say for that one, I wasn't necessarily prepared at all." She discussed the variance of different communities. She said, "It's hard to be prepared for that because every community is different." She also added, if an opportunity presents itself, she is all in. In discussion of qualified professionals to teach ED, Cara stated immediately, "An open mind." She went on to discuss beyond the training and licensing,that the teacher has to be willing to approach things differently. She stated, "There is only so much your education can prepare you for." Being open minded and being able to "go with the flow" were stressed. After sighing, she said, "It's just, you just got to have the whole package." On general preparedness, Cara said, "Well, I would say honestly like through my whole experience it's been like trial and error and like working through it."

Three Preparatory Elements Considered of Highest Importance

In discussion of the three preparatory elements of highest importance Cara stressed behavior management and knowing how to collect data and correctly implement FBA's and BIP's. She added that case studies would be helpful. She then discussed social emotional learning in terms of social skills. The third most important was a broad understanding as a

qualified profession of students with ED. She said, "I would say like a full understanding of what those emotional disabilities are and the different ways they can manifest." Cara expanded her thoughts on preparing qualified ED teachers by saying,

> I feel like ED is such a broad and vague kind of stamp that you put on it because every student with an emotional disability is completely different than the last one you interacted with, you know, and where that emotional disability comes from and where it stems from is always different."

She concluded with sharing that despite peaks and valleys she felt working with the students with ED was worth it.

Structural Description: Cara

Perceived Preparedness Regarding the Critical Element Areas

Cara's tone through the interview was protective and motherly regarding her work with students with ED. She mentioned the classroom environment was intentionally comfortable and had a "family atmosphere." She stressed differentiation and flexibility in the classroom environmental set up. Cara was transparent in her perceived lack of preparedness for behavior management in an ED classroom. Although she knew of FBA's and BIP's she strived to know more and to be more proficient at behavior management. Social skills development she learned was important for her ED students and she garnered most of her information from personal research and professional development opportunities. Behavioral consultants and teaching assistants were crucial in Cara's eyes to support students academically in the general academics. When parent and family involvement was discussed, Cara was excited to share that she did feel quite prepared for that element. She again threaded the family element into communications with parents and how important that relationship with home and family was for students with ED.

Community supports was an area that she did not remember reviewing in college and she also felt that that element would be different based on where a school was located. She was open to be involved in any offered community support of engagement. A qualified professional needed to have the "whole package" in terms of course work, but also open minded, flexible, and being able to "go with the flow." Cara was comfortable with "trial and error" attempts to find best fit and success in many element areas.

Three Preparatory Elements Considered of Highest Importance

Cara rated behavior management as incredibly important. She then noted that social skills were essential. The third component was ensuring that a teacher of ED was highly qualified including knowing more about the emotional disabilities. Cara thought knowing more about types of emotional disabilities and how they manifest would benefit the qualified professional.

Textural Description: Jess

Jess is a teacher of students with ED in a self-contained high school classroom that services students with ED and other conditions. Jess has taught students with ED for 9 years. Jess holds a mild intervention license.

Perceived Preparedness Regarding the Critical Element Areas

We began discussing environmental supports. Jess recalled a beginning class where she was asked to create a classroom diagram. She said, "Did it pertain to an ED classroom? No, not at all." She described seeing classroom layouts when she used to substitute teach and she kept track of the good ideas. Jess described "learning along the way" in terms of classroom environment and layout. On the topic of preparedness for behavior management, Jess recalled that she had two specific courses for emotional disabilities, but not specific to behavior management. She laughed and added that the one professor said, "Well, I call my own ED kid a

butthead." She said, "So, there wasn't a class on classroom management or how to handle

behaviors and strategies and that type of stuff. They were like, more of, these are our

experiences, and this is what we did." Jess went on to explain that those examples were primarily

about elementary experiences and she is at the high school level and "that's two different ends."

She said, "Again, it was a learn as you go process." Jess had a mother that taught, and she had a

few mentor teachers in the high school. These individuals she felt she could call on for

behavioral management advice. Jess laughed and added, "If you have any strategies, please

share. The one I'm looking for is refusal to comply." On the topic of social skills preparation,

Jess shared that it also was a "learn as you go" process. She described students migrating though

social skills programs from their other schools. Jess said about her students' response to social

skills, "They're like, oh well, this is like when I met with the so and so." She went on to add,

"I'm expected to plan for it, to have these units built, but it's not going to happen because what

one kids needs, they all need, but they don't want it at the same time." In discussion of

preparation for academic supports, Jess stated, "But again, it was all geared for elementary." She

said, "When we're looking at high school groups, there's not much there for how you support

these low-level readers." Jess added that academic preparatory courses geared toward high

school were rare to find. The topic turned to parent and family involvement and Jess shared that

she had preparatory experience in Michigan at a school using the Dr. Comer "whole child"

methodology. She stated, "As a parent, you had to put in so many hours of school involvement

and all this stuff." She added that wraparound services and counseling services were built into

the school environment. She laughed and stated in regard to beginning to teach, "It's a shocker

when you get to see what actually happens." She described many parents as "ED themselves."

Jess shared, "The parents at the high school level are just nonexistent. They're at the end of their

rope." Jess felt preparatory experiences involving community supports all depended on what community you teach in and what is available. She said, "You have to talk to lots of people to find out what supports are out there." She shared that experienced teachers in a building could share knowledge of community support. She added, "If you're the only ED teacher in a building than there's not much." In discussion of qualified professionals to teach ED, Jess said, "I wish I had more counseling background." She described "filling her toolbox with counseling type stuff" geared for high schoolers. She stated that patience is needed. Jess shared, "Knowing the different types of ED-ness that is out there would be helpful." She added that the ability to problem solve, to triage, and to detach emotionally is helpful. Jess said regarding qualified professionals, "Goodness, being able to start the day fresh, every day, or even the following hour, you know." She also added, "I guess being able to not hold it against them, right? As they might be cussing you out then be fine after they get done."

Three Preparatory Elements Considered of Highest Importance

Jess shared in her preparatory experience there wasn't much preparation. When asked to share the three elements of highest importance, Jess began with behavior management. She described it as "having in the toolbox multiple ways, not just your basic types of behavior management, but the out-of-the-box thinking type stuff." Jess felt that social skills was also a critical element. She said, "Being able to modify and know how to adapt those social skills classes that you have to teach these kids." She laughed and added, "You have to create something to show because everyone wants lessons, but there's nothing really available." The third element was the overall qualified professional. Jess described the teacher as being able to decipher the behavior. She stated, "To be able to detach yourself enough from the situation at hand to teach the kids in the moment." Jess added, "The critical thing is to know what is that

student doing, why are they doing it, and how to help them evolve past it."

Structural Description: Jess

Perceived Preparedness Regarding the Critical Element Areas

Jess was quick to smile and laugh as we interviewed. She was transparent in sharing that her preparatory experiences specifically regarding students with ED had been meager. In several critical element areas, she described "learning as you go." She felt that sharing stories about students with emotional disabilities at the college level was not the same as learning about the physiology of ED and available types of behavioral management techniques. Her academic training was adequate, but she felt she lacked in the skill set needed to help remediate high schoolers that lagged in reading or math proficiencies. She shared that most college strategies were geared for elementary aged students. Her Michigan experience gave her a unique window into parent and community involvement. She found this level of involvement, however, varied with student age group, school, and community. She felt strongly that a qualified professional of students with ED should have more counseling type skill training and a broader understanding of the types of ED and its physiology and treatment.

Three Preparatory Elements Considered of Highest Importance

Jess was clear in that behavior management was important. She stressed that training in behavior management should yield multiple strategies and scenarios for working with students with ED. Jess felt that social skills for students with ED was also important. She thought the materials and curriculum tools were scarce and that at the high school level the material needed to be created to fit the need of the students. The third most important was to be a highly qualified professional to teach ED. Jess felt that a teacher of students with ED should be able to teach the students in the moment and to start each moment, hour, or day fresh. She felt it was important to

always give the student the opportunity to start fresh and to not internalize the behaviors

personally.

Textural Description: Heidi

Heidi is a teacher of students with ED in a self-contained elementary classroom that

services students with ED and other conditions. Heidi has taught students with ED for 6 years.

Heidi holds a mild intervention license.

Perceived Preparedness Regarding the Critical Element Areas

Heidi sighed when asked about perception of preparedness for providing environmental

supports. She said, "I think with the ED population it is a little bit different in how you arrange

your grouping. I think that's something you learn as you go." She went on to discuss always

placing her worktable near the door "to make sure we catch them before they get out the door."

Heidi shared that she felt students with ED need space and "don't want to be next to each other."

Heidi said, "I was not prepared for one to hop out of a window." She said, "I think some of what

appears in your classroom is not something we necessarily teach." We began to discuss behavior

management. Heidi said, "I was prepared behavior management-wise." She shared she had a

strong behavior management program including specific and clear rules. She described using a

level system and students earning privileges. Heidi added, "Now, some of the behaviors I've

encountered I don't think you're prepared for some of them. I don't care who you are." She

described behaviors that include physical aggression including scratching, biting, and throwing

feces. She said, "I don't think there's any class in college that's preparing you for that." When

asked about perception of preparedness to teach social skills, Heidi stated, "I don't feel I was

prepared for that." She discussed working with students in the moment and currently working on

"thinking before saying." She shared that in general education social emotional learning is a big

thing now and she felt special educators had always been involved in social emotional learning. Heidi felt confident in her preparation to teach academically. She mentioned task analysis and being able to teach toward academic goals. She stated, "I felt very prepared for the actual academics." When asked about perception of preparedness regarding parent and family involvement, Heidi shook her head and stated, "I was not prepared for that. I wish I could say I was." Heidi described being raised in a loving and nurturing home and that she had a hard time comprehending all that her students with ED went through when they left school. She stated, "There is sexual abuse, emotional abuse, physical abuse, and neglect. They are dealing with so much more and I wasn't prepared for that aspect of it." She went on to add that maybe more classes on the trauma kids face would have been helpful. As we discussed community supports for students with ED, Heidi made a face, shook her head, and said, "I'm pretty easy to read, there was no support or preparation on that." She discussed that making connections with other agencies was difficult and a "big miscommunication." She added, "We do have behavior consultants now and some people coming in that were providing some services, but again there is a lot of disconnect." In discussion of the elements of a qualified professional to teach students with ED, Heidi began with patience. She said, "I think you have to have patience. When they are calling you filthy names you have to have thick enough skin that you don't take it personally." Heidi added that an understanding that these are children with "an illness" was necessary. Beyond the coursework and licensing, Heidi felt being able to multi-task was a critical skill in a self-contained classroom. This encompasses academics and behavior management. She said, "One eye is working with the group and the other eye is making sure Johnny over there is back in his seat." She stated, "You don't get a lot of interaction with other special ed people." Heidi added that having a sense of humor was needed sometimes. She said regarding humor, "If you

didn't, you would literally just crumble sometimes." Heidi reiterated that a qualified professional provides consistency, structure, and patience.

Three Preparatory Elements Considered of Highest Importance

Heidi identified behavior management as the preparatory element of the highest importance. She discussed understanding behaviors and being able to identify and replace behaviors. Heidi felt that social skills was the next critical element. She said, "I think we need to provide social skills because they need to know the replacement behavior." She felt without the appropriate social skills, students with ED will be "kicked out of general education." The third critical element Heidi identified was environmental supports.

Structural Description: Heidi

Perceived Preparedness Regarding the Critical Element Areas

Heidi was candid and black and white in her responses of prepared or not prepared regarding the key elements. She was passionate about her work with elementary students with ED. Heidi felt that although she was prepared to set up a classroom physically, she was not prepared for the extreme behaviors that would need special arrangement and intentional placement of furniture and personnel. She mentioned "learning as you go." She felt prepared in the area of behavior management and stressed the importance of patience, consistency, clear rules, and having a general behavior system with paired privileges. Heidi deemed social skills education was highly valuable for students with ED. She did not feel prepared to teach or provide social skills training despite its value. She also felt she had to learn as she went along and focused on the teachable moments. Academics she felt she was prepared to teach. Heidi did discuss the difficulty of teaching academics across multiple grade levels. Regarding parent and family involvement, Heidi shared she was not prepared for the depth or intensity of the lives her

students would lead after school. Community supports and involvement she shared she was also not prepared for and even now she feels there are gaps in opportunities for students with ED. Heidi described the qualified professional to teach students with ED would have the components of patience, tough skin, humor, and empathy. She felt the teacher should be able to multi-task within the self-contained classroom and also have an understanding that their field can be lonely.

Three Preparatory Elements Considered of Highest Importance

Heidi was concise and black and white as she categorized the three most important critical elements. She identified behavior management first. She felt behavior management was the foundation of support for students with ED and that it was critical the teacher implement behavior management in a consistent and structured way. Social skills she regarded as the second most important critical element. Future success for her students depended on positive and social accepted replacement behaviors. The third element she identified was environmental supports for students with ED. Heidi shared the importance of these three elements and also how they merged together to provide an amalgamated support for students with ED.

Textural Description: Toni

Toni is a teacher of students with ED in a self-contained elementary classroom that services students with ED and other conditions. Toni has taught students with ED for 13 years. Toni holds a mild intervention license.

Perceived Preparedness Regarding the Critical Element Areas

Toni described herself as not being prepared for understanding the physical environmental supports for students with ED. She said, "No, I do not feel I was prepared at all." She felt ED classrooms were so scarce she did not have an opportunity to observe in one. Toni described laying out her classroom as guessing how best to lay it out. She said, "You know it is

trial and error." She added she moves strategically within the classroom. She said regarding her

students, "They know if I'm moving closer to the door, they need to start gathering their things

for a possible evacuation." Toni shared that within her classroom there are traditional desks,

centers, a kidney table for small group work, and a couch with weighted sensory blankets

available. She said she has a padded time out room which they call a "calming room" or

"seclusion room." She described attempting to make functional areas positive for the students.

On the topic of perception of preparedness regarding behavior management, Toni said about her

first day of teaching, "My kids come in and within five minutes I have my first fight. I was not

prepared for this." She described having a friend that is a psychologist that she bounces ideas off

of. She also shared that she reads and asks parents to find out best strategies for behavior

management. She said, "You have to kind of be in the driver's seat of what you want to learn."

Regarding social skills, Toni stated, "I feel like social skills I was a little bit more prepared." She

discussed roleplay and the use of tone, cadence, and volume during social interactions. She also

shared that through working with students with autism she has learned more about social

roleplay. Although she felt prepared for academic interventions, Toni did not feel prepared for

the ED "spectrum" of academics. She also stressed that the students' "essential needs" must be

met before academic learning can take place. Toni said, "I just think about a sinking ship

sometimes with these kids, and the only way to keep this ship from sinking is to get the water out

of the ship." Toni stressed the need to start everyday new. She said, "If they're not starting fresh,

they're not going to learn." Family and parent involvement was a critical element area that Toni

felt she was prepared for and that her preparatory experience stressed, "families come first." Toni

discussed working as a team with parents and joining forces to have a "united front." She said,

"It's almost like a mom and dad situation at home, you know. Mom says 'no, you can't have an

extra cookie' but dad says I can." She felt they had to be united and work for the student's best interest. Regarding community supports, Toni said, "I don't think that was ever mentioned." She added, "I don't think community support has really ever been big on the radar for kids with emotional disabilities." She wished there were more information and support available for students with ED. In discussion of a qualified professional to teach ED, Toni stated, "It's a very lonely life being an ED teacher. No one knows what you go through on a day-to-day basis and you will never be able to fully explain what you go through on a day-to-day basis." She added for that reason a qualified professional must reach out, collaborate, and ask for help or "otherwise you're lost." Toni stressed that a qualified professional "wears many hats" and must multi-task. She said, "You've got to be all these roles because you're there for them and they usually don't have anybody else for what they need." Toni discussed being flexible because your day may change, and you may have to go from plan A to plan B quickly if there is a crisis. She stated, "Your lesson plans may not come to fruition."

Three Preparatory Elements Considered of Highest Importance

When asked what three preparatory elements she considered of highest importance Toni stated, "The top three, I think it would be environmental support, behavior management, and qualified professional." Toni went on to discuss the three elements. She said, "So, you know, we have to be aware of what they need, and we have to be constantly thinking on our toes and how we are going to give them what they need, and it can change on a dime." With that lens she felt the qualified professional would have the coursework and licensure, but also an understanding of special education law and restraint guidance. She deemed it the most important element. She then discussed behavior management as the next most important. Toni stated, "In my classroom behavior management and social skills goes [*sic*] hand in hand." Regarding environmental

supports, Toni stated, "I think it's so, so important because if we have environmental supports in place, then the classroom runs so much smoother."

Structural Description: Toni

Perceived Preparedness Regarding the Critical Element Areas

Through the interview, Toni demonstrated a mixture of relief and pride in being able to discuss the lived experience of teaching students with ED and an underlying thread of sadness. Toni felt that much of what she garnered through her preparatory experience was "learn as you go" and "take the driver's seat" to oversee your own learning to support students with ED. She felt that behavior management should be positive and consistent and that it went hand in hand with social skills. She was comfortable with academic interventions and differentiation, but the width and "spectrum" of academics for a self-contained ED classroom was not what she had anticipated and was cumbersome. Toni felt prepared for parent and family involvement and engagement and she strived to work on a "united front" with parents to support the child. She was not prepared to engage in community supports for students with ED. The qualified professional of students with ED she felt should be legally savvy. They should collaborate with others and advocate for the student and program. At several junctures Toni shared it was important to understand the field is lonely.

Three Preparatory Elements Considered of Highest Importance

Toni felt that the most important was that an individual must be a qualified professional beyond the course work and licensure. She felt a teacher of ED must understand the job will be lonely and challenging. Toni felt understanding special education law was imperative to the role as well as collaborating with others and researching best practice techniques. Toni felt the qualified professional must "be able to handle it" and be consistent. The second element of

highest importance was behavior management. Toni felt this went hand in hand with social skills. As a foundation, Toni felt students would succeed academically if essential needs were met first including the environment. Environmental supports she listed as the third most critical element.

Composite Textural Description from Participants with Mild Licensure Perceived Preparedness Regarding the Critical Element Areas

All the teacher interview participants with mild licensure referred to a "learn as you go" or "trial and error" strategies regarding the specific preparation for many critical element areas to support students with ED. All candidates shared they had not had experience through practicum or student teaching in an actual ED self-contained classroom or resource room. Environmental supports and the physical layout of the classroom for students with ED was not an area in which the candidates felt prepared. The classroom environment descriptions ranged from "typical classroom setup" to "family atmosphere." Several candidates mentioned flexibility in seating arrangements. Several candidates referred to capturing ideas about physical classroom layout from seeing and experiencing other classrooms. The perception of preparation for behavior management was described by the teacher interview participants generally as "not something you can be prepared for." All candidates shared they felt unprepared to provide successful behavior management. All candidates felt preparation in behavior management was of high importance as a critical element area. Ideas generated by the teacher interviews included needing college experience in a self-contained classroom or resource room with ED students, behavior scenarios and case studies, and a broader understanding of "ED-ness" as one candidate stated. A broader understanding of behavioral management techniques was also identified. One candidate called this a "toolbox" of resources to utilize in different situations. The teacher candidates, as a whole,

did not feel prepared to create or teach social skills curriculum. Several candidates noted the lack

of availability of suitable social skills programs for the middle and high school aged student. All

candidates felt social skills training for students with ED was an area connected to the students

current and future success. Regarding academics, the interviewed candidates did perceive

themselves to be prepared for teaching academics to students with ED. They also felt prepared to

differentiate instruction. All candidates shared a similar acknowledgement that they had not been

prepared for the large "spectrum" of skill levels they would encounter academically. Parent and

family involvement was a critical element area that most of the candidates felt was stressed in

their preparatory experiences and they felt it continued to be key to successful student

programming. Some candidates shared they were not fully prepared for the instability or level of

dysfunction they would encounter working with the parents of students with ED. One participant

noted that many parents were "ED themselves." Community supports for students with ED was

not an area that the body of candidates remembered being specifically prepared in to work with

students with ED. Several candidates expressed that the preparatory training for that was relevant

to where you taught and that the body of responsibility for outlining community supports may be

with the individual school corporation. The discussion on preparation to be a qualified

professional to teach students with ED was broad and highly emotional. College training and

licensure was considered an absolute to preparation. Beyond the college level training, consistent

themes from the teacher candidates regarding the total qualified professional included patience,

perseverance, ability to deal with loneliness, flexibility, ability to multi-task, ability to

collaborate, and the ability to separate from the behavior and not take it personally. All teacher

candidates stressed the importance of starting each day fresh and letting go of any feelings

regarding past behavior.

Three Preparatory Elements Considered of Highest Importance

All teacher candidates with mild licensure identified behavior management as one of the three preparatory elements of highest importance. The candidates included preparation in a variety of behavioral management techniques, behavioral case studies, and role play as areas that would be helpful in preparation to teach students with ED. They also felt exposure to actual classrooms that teach students with ED would have been helpful. The second preparatory element identified by most candidates was social skills. The candidates identified with the social skills deficits that students with ED exhibit and the need for social skill remediation. Candidates felt pressure to create and develop social skills curriculum without consistent support or materials. The third element deemed most important was to prepare qualified professionals to teach students with ED. The input by candidates was broad, but the candidates felt that students with ED need a teacher that is highly qualified in all the critical element areas and with an understanding of the scope of care needed to teach students with ED.

Composite Structural Description from Participants with Mild Licensure

Perceived Preparedness Regarding the Critical Element Areas

Critical element areas the candidates perceived they were prepared included academics and parent and family involvement. Teacher candidates with mild licensure as a body did not perceive themselves to be prepared in the areas of environmental supports, behavior management, social skills, and community supports. Beyond the college level training, consistent themes from the teacher candidates regarding the total qualified professional included patience, perseverance, ability to deal with loneliness, flexibility, ability to multi-task, ability to collaborate, and the ability to separate from the behavior and not take it personally.

Three Preparatory Elements Considered of Highest Importance

The consolidated responses of candidates identified behavior management, social skills, and the qualified professional as the three elements of highest importance. All candidates felt behavior management was a key element. They felt the qualified professional needed exposure to all the element areas.

Textural-Structural Synthesis from Participants with Mild Licensure

The most consistent thread of thought through the interviews with teacher candidates with mild licensure related to the needs of students with ED and their desire as teachers to know more. All candidates agreed that preparation in behavior management skills was critical and essential. All candidates wished they had more exposure to the scope of services and best practice techniques to support students with ED such as actual experiences in a self-contained classroom for students with ED. Most candidates identified social skills as the next critical element, and they wished they had more preparation to teach and create social skills curriculums for their given grade levels. A thread of understanding that teaching students with ED was often lonely and difficult was woven into a larger blanket of understanding that the work is essential and that wholly qualified professionals are needed.

Interviews with Teacher Candidates with an ED License

Textural Description: Wanda

Wanda is a teacher of students with ED in an elementary resource classroom that services students with ED and other conditions. Wanda has taught students with ED for 14 years. Wanda holds an ED license.

Perceived Preparedness Regarding the Critical Element Areas

Wanda discussed her perception of preparedness regarding environmental supports and

the physical layout of the classroom. Wanda stated, "I remember doing a classroom map or plan for seating areas on graph paper." She mentioned discussion of classroom layouts and time out areas. Regarding behavior management support, Wanda smiled and said, "I'd say my preparation was good." She went on to describe a former professor that taught "a whole lot of behavior management." Wanda shared that the professor discussed target behaviors and how to measure and track a behavior goal. She said, "We had assignments to see the baseline and develop a plan." She went on to say that the same professor taught about reinforcement. Regarding both environment and behavior management, Wanda shared she had been allowed to observe and participate in many classrooms during her college preparation. In this way she saw different classroom layouts and behavior systems. She shared, "I had a lot of experiences. Many more than students do now." She described a laboratory school on the college campus and that she had the opportunity to observe in many types of classrooms. We discussed preparation in social skills and Wanda shook her head and said hesitantly, "None." She described there were other influences in social skills once she started teaching. She recalled being given a social skills book called, "Skillstreaming" by a mentor teacher. In discussion of preparation for academic supports, Wanda felt she was well prepared by one of her college professors to teach math. She also shared she felt prepared to teach writing. She disclosed she was not prepared at all to teach reading. Wanda stated, "I had no classes on how to teach reading. Zero. Zero classes on how to teach reading." Wanda described that there was no preparation or course work regarding parent and family involvement. She said, "If I learned anything about that it would have been in experiences outside of campus." Wanda did not feel she had preparatory experience involving community supports. When asked to discuss what it is to be a qualified professional to teach ED, Wanda expanded on the understanding of behavior management. She said, "I guess behavior

modification and the psychology and science of it and the theory behind it." She felt that new

teachers of ED did not understand some of the concepts. She said, "You know, like planned

ignoring and extinction." She went on to say, "I've even heard special ed teachers say, you

know, I tried it for a few days and then gave it up." She felt more psychology courses and a

broader understanding of behavior modification is necessary for preparation of a qualified

professional to teach ED.

Three Preparatory Elements Considered of Highest Importance

Wanda felt that behavior management was the most important critical element. She then

identified social skills as the second most critical element. The third critical element she

identified as environmental supports. Wanda said, "I think those three are important." She added

that academics can be adjusted depending on what subject and grade level you teach. She also

noted that community supports vary depending on your location. Wanda felt the three key

elements of behavior management, social skills, and environmental supports were best provided

during the preparatory experience. She said, "They seem to be fluid. They would be the things

that help you in every situation."

Structural Description: Wanda

Perceived Preparedness Regarding the Critical Element Areas

Wanda was quiet and reflective through the interviewing. She clearly recalled the

preparatory training in environmental supports through graph paper drawings, discussion, and

classroom observations. Wanda felt well prepared for behavior management. She was passionate

about the need to have a deeper understanding of behavior modification and the psychology

involved in interacting with students with ED. She felt that the turnover of newer teachers may

be due to this lack of knowledge and understanding. Wanda felt she was not prepared to teach

social skills. She did feel that social skills were critical and necessary for students with ED.

Wanda had a mixed preparation regarding academics, but she felt a teacher could adjust

depending on assigned subject and grade level. Family and community involvement were areas

that she felt she had not been exposed or prepared. She felt that a qualified professional teaching

students with ED needed more background knowledge in psychology and general behavior

modification. Beyond the discussion of the critical elements, themes of exposure and experience

were revealed throughout the interviews with Wanda.

Three Preparatory Elements Considered of Highest Importance

Wanda identified behavior management, social skills, and environmental supports as the

three preparatory elements of highest importance. Of the three she ranked behavior management

as the most important. She felt the other critical elements were dependent on grade level and

location.

Textural Description: Missy

Missy is a teacher of students with ED in a high school self-contained classroom that

services students with ED and other conditions. Missy has taught students with ED for 19 years.

Missy holds an ED license.

Perceived Preparedness Regarding the Critical Element Areas

Missy described herself as prepared regarding environmental supports. Missy shared that

she knew how to set up a classroom. She added, "I was able to survive the broom closet and the

little room in back of the janitor's closet where we were always put." She referenced her

beginning teaching days and said, "I've been able to take just about any space they've given me

and create an environment for my students, so yes, I was prepared for that." Regarding behavior

management, Missy said, "I don't think anything really prepares you for the real life in this

room. The in-your-face type behaviors." She added that you gain knowledge and skills from your

experience. She shook her head sadly and added, "I don't think a book can teach you the horror

that some of these kids are living and how they portray that in your classroom." As we began to

discuss preparation to teach social skills, Missy laughed and said dryly, "Well, students with ED

do not have social skills." She did not expand largely on how prepared she was, but she said,

"That's a class that school systems always want you to teach, but I have not taught in a school

system yet that has provided the curriculum." She said, "I have to make my own social skills

curriculum." She discussed learning to create her own social skills materials. She added, "It takes

experience to be able to create social skills curriculum and to know exactly what they need." She

added most social skills curriculum is geared to younger students. Wanda was eager to discuss

academic preparedness. She said, "Well, I had to take everything. I had to take everything from

math to English to science to social studies." She added, "I was very prepared to give my

students' academic support." Missy said, "I even had to take a board writing class." She shared

her concern that newer teachers would send students to her because they did not teach certain

subjects. She teasingly mocked that they would say, "I don't do math. I don't do science. I don't

do English." In this way she felt the shortening of academic preparation for newer teachers was a

"disservice." Missy felt very prepared in the area of parent and family involvement. She recalled

a professor that had the class break down the steps to gain family support. Missy added, "Most of

the time these parents are hearing, you know, negative things about their child." She added, "So,

I think that's why they tend to be not supportive, because they think every time you call it's

going to be for them to pick up their child or that he's suspended for the day." Missy shared, "I

try to give them as many positive calls as I can so when I do have to make that call, I do have

their support." Missy felt prepared regarding community supports. She recalled having

completed a case study in the community. She added, "I was very prepared." When asked to

expand what it is to be a qualified professional to teach ED, Missy quickly said, "I think the

training needs to be more specific." Missy shared that longer student teaching times, case studies

in emotional disabilities, and understanding specific learning and behavior targets would help

prepare qualified professionals to teach students with ED. She said, "I can see there's a reason

why younger teachers are quitting after one or two years of teaching emotional disabilities. I

really feel they have not been prepared to do that."

Three Preparatory Elements Considered of Highest Importance

Missy identified behavior management as the top preparatory element. She felt that

behavior management preparation today should include cultural and gender diversity

components. She asked, "If you don't understand where your students come from, how do you

relate to them, so that they trust you?" Missy identified academic supports as the second element

of highest importance. She felt it was important to have a broad foundation of academics to be

able to support students academically. Missy felt that parent and family involvement was the

third most important preparatory element. She touched on how important it was to communicate

with families and to gain their trust. She shared that there should be an understanding that some

families will be dysfunctional, and the teacher must be prepared to interact with the easy and the

tough families.

Structural Description: Missy

Perceived Preparedness Regarding the Critical Element Areas

Missy was proud of her school background and she exuded confidence in her level of

preparedness in all the critical elements. She felt she had been prepared to set up classroom

environments for students with ED. She expanded on having experience in setting up less than

ideal locations and making them positive. Regarding behavior management she felt that the reality was that certain negative behaviors a teacher cannot be prepared for in the classroom. Social skills seemed to be a source of consternation. Despite that, she stressed that it takes experience to be able to create successfully meaningful social skills curricula at the high school level. She felt strongly prepared in general academics and she felt this was a support for students and for her special education colleagues that did not have licensure in certain subjects. Missy felt prepared to communicate with and involve parental and community supports successfully. Missy felt that qualified professionals of students with ED needed specific training in ED and in behavior management. Beyond the discussion of the critical elements, Missy's interview revealed themes of exposure and experience, perseverance and deflection, lonely and solo, and relationships and empathy.

Three Preparatory Elements Considered of Highest Importance

Missy determined that behavior management was the most important critical element. She emphasized that the behavioral management lens should be understanding and diverse. Missy identified academic supports as the second most important preparatory element. The third element was parent and family involvement. She felt these three elements were of highest importance.

Textural Description: Rhonda

Rhonda is a teacher of students with ED in an elementary self-contained classroom that services students with ED and other conditions. Rhonda has taught students with ED for 1 year but has taught in other areas for 25 years. Rhonda holds an ED license.

Perceived Preparedness Regarding the Critical Element Areas

Rhonda sighed and looked into the distance when she was asked about preparedness

regarding physical classroom environment. She said, "I don't remember a whole lot about what we discussed, honestly, because it's been so long." She reflected that she did not remember a lot about a formal set up of the classroom. Rhonda expanded and said, "Whether a student has an emotional disability or not, they're still students, and they still have a lot of the same needs." Rhonda felt increasing "space" between students was important because boundaries could be a trigger. Rhonda answered more confidently about behavior management preparation. She said, "I was strongly prepared." She recalled having a specific class on behavior management. She said, "You know, the rules, and structure and routine and that kind of thing." She added it was important to not make behavior systems too complicated or too punitive. Regarding the students with ED she said, "I think they need a little more room for some grace and some mercy." She expanded on what she would tell a new teacher. She said,

> I would just stress very common-sense things and teaching the rules, refreshing the rules, practicing the rules, kind of a muscle memory kind of thing where maybe you roleplay the rules. And just referring to the rules, so then a rule violation is not emotional.

The discussion turned to preparation for social skills. Rhonda stated regarding students with ED, "They have had some really terrible examples. I think our job as a school is to go through and find the skill gaps in social skills, just as we do in phonics or just as we do in multiplication." As far as being prepared to teach social skills, Rhonda said, "I don't remember it being discussed at all." The interview moved to preparation to teach academics. This is Rhonda's first year teaching students with ED in a self-contained classroom. She felt generally prepared for academics through her preparation program. Preparation for parent and family involvement was discussed next. Rhonda said, "The more parents are involved, the better." She discussed positive contacts, communication tools, making connections, and trust. She did not recall if this had been

specifically discussed in preparation to teach students with ED but felt it was important. Rhonda

shared, "Community support, that's probably what I had the least involvement with." She

discussed that there was a local mental health facility and that she had sat in on child and family

team meetings. She felt community supports had not been an area she perceived that she had

been prepared. Regarding a qualified professional to teach students with ED, Rhonda stated,

"Some people get it, and some people don't." Rhonda felt having preparatory experience and

quality mentors helped create qualified professionals. Regarding preparing teachers, Rhonda felt

that experiences and being mentored by good teachers was important. She said, "I think those

mentor experiences are really, really crucial." She shared that the ability to "triage" situations

and the ability to "create connections" was also critical.

Three Preparatory Elements Considered of Highest Importance

Rhonda shared she had contemplated this question since the first interview. She said

regarding the critical elements, "It's a tapestry really, and they all weave together and without

part of it, there's a blank." Rhonda felt that having a qualified professional was "critical".

Rhonda felt the second critical element was parent and family involvement. Rhonda said,

"Parental support is critical, but that's the one we know the least about." Rhonda identified

environmental supports as the third most critical element. She said, "Obviously environmental

supports in the classroom are critical." Rhonda also felt strongly regarding community supports.

She reiterated, "The qualified professional is the umbrella for all these other things."

Structural Description: Rhonda

Perceived Preparedness Regarding the Critical Element Areas

Rhonda spoke with an air of experience, despite being her first year teaching in a self-

contained classroom for students with ED. She did not feel specifically prepared for classroom

environmental supports. She felt that "common sense" assisted with that element and that "spacing" was helpful. Rhonda felt strongly prepared for behavior management and discussed the importance of practical rules and the rehearsal of the rules with students. She added that having rules in place assists in behavior management as it makes it procedural instead of personal. Social skills was an area that she did not feel prepared. She did feel that students with ED should have social skills gaps remediated in the same way we analyze and remediate academic skills. Academics was an area that Rhonda felt prepared. Parental involvement and community supports were two areas that Rhonda did not recall being introduced to during her preparatory work. Beyond the discussion of the critical elements, Rhonda's interview revealed themes of exposure and experience and relationships and empathy.

Three Preparatory Elements Considered of Highest Importance

Rhonda used the metaphor of a tapestry as we discussed the three preparatory elements of highest importance. She felt that being a total qualified professional was key and that it held the threads of the tapestry together. She melded behavior management and social skills as part of the qualified professional. She tiered parent and family involvement at the second most important element. Rhonda felt environmental support was the third most critical element.

Textural Description: Cindy

Cindy is a teacher of students with ED in a middle school self-contained classroom that services students with ED and other conditions. Cindy has taught students with ED for 22 years. Cindy holds an ED license.

Perceived Preparedness Regarding the Critical Element Areas

Cindy smiled warmly and discussed preparation for environmental supports. She said, "I do remember a lot of that because you do get that through your student teaching experience."

She added, "I kind of feel I was prepared for that part of it." She shared about having many

opportunities to observe in a variety of classrooms. When asked about preparation for behavior

management, Cindy stated, "I remember reading a book on exceptional children. I think it was

called, Exceptional Children, and I do think it was pretty descriptive." She did not add further

but felt the book and its descriptions had helped prepare her for behavior management. On the

topic of social skills, Cindy described her preparation as "understudied." She laughed and added,

"A lot of kids need to work on those skills in general." She mentioned that when she previously

taught high school, the students did not think they needed social skills. Regarding social skills

curriculum she said, "I really don't know what resources to go to for that, even currently, right

now." She shared she does utilize a "teachable moment" when it arises. Cindy discussed that she

was prepared for the basic academic instruction. She said, "You come up with the curriculum

and it's all on you." Cindy went on to say, "I absolutely love the fact that I can honestly tell you

that no two kids are alike. But I will tell you the variance is jaw-dropping." She shared several

whimsical stories regarding students and their unique learning variances. She said, "Yeah, I

could tell you stories all day." The conversation turned to preparation for parent and family

involvement. She said, "Actually we weren't even trained." She did add that information on

Ruby Payne and poverty had been something she had been introduced to and she found it

helpful. Cindy said seriously, "I didn't realize that there were parents that just some of them just

don't have a thing, or they have grandparents who are just so worn out. They're just dealing with

everyday life, you know." Regarding preparation for community support Cindy bluntly said, "I

knew nothing about that." When asked what it is to be a qualified professional to teach ED,

Cindy began with the words "professional" and "confidential". She went on to say she felt it was

important to have "book knowledge." Cindy added that one thing she was not prepared for was

to be a supervisor for a teaching assistant. She said, "That's actually a whole skill set that you kind of have to know." Cindy said, "One thing I think that's very important is to not take their behavior personal and not let it affect you personally." She described a qualified professional as someone "even-keeled." She said, "You have to just realize that, you know, that kid is having a bad day and it doesn't have to affect yours. Biggest goal is to keep it from affecting others." Cindy reflectively added, "You know, I stayed in this field you know. I am here for a reason. It just fell in my lap and for some reason, I . . . I clung to it." She added, "I felt home."

Three Preparatory Elements Considered of Highest Importance

Regarding the three preparatory elements of highest importance, Cindy said, "I wish I could wave a magic wand and have parent and family involvement be a little more priority, but as far as how it really looks, behavior management is key." She felt environment was the second most important element. Cindy listed social skills as the third most important element. She said, "Social skills hit me as a surprise, I think I already told you that. I didn't realize, you know, I've got students, even currently, that might say something rude and not realize how rude it sounds." Regarding all three elements that she chose, Cindy said, "We have to work on the emotions first to learn."

Structural Description: Cindy

Perceived Preparedness Regarding the Critical Element Areas

Cindy had an interview style like calm folk music. She was confident, humorous, and relaxed. Cindy felt prepared for classroom environmental supports and attributed that to the opportunities to observe many classes during her student teaching. Cindy felt generally prepared for behavior management and thought the book, *Exceptional Children*, had significant influence. Cindy thought social skills instruction was critical for students with ED, but she described her

preparation for social skills as "understudied." Academics she was satisfactorily prepared for, but she thought the variance in skill levels was "jaw-dropping." Cindy was influenced by professional development regarding poverty, but felt she was not prepared for parent and family involvement. When asked about preparation for community supports, she said, "I know nothing about that." Cindy was thoughtful and reflective as she discussed attributes of a qualified professional to teach students with ED. She mentioned professional, confidential, and being "even-keeled." Overall, there was a feeling that the teacher of students with ED must understand the wholeness of the student and the variances that they will encounter. Beyond the discussion of the critical elements, Cindy's interview revealed themes of lonely and solo, exposure and experience, perseverance and deflection, and relationships and empathy.

Three Preparatory Elements Considered of Highest Importance

Cindy identified behavior management as the key critical element. She felt that environmental support was the second most important element. Although she had not been prepared to teach social skills, she felt it was the third most important element. She felt the other elements were more dependent on the location and situation of the school, district, and individual classroom.

Textural Description: Michael

Michael is a teacher of students with ED in a middle school self-contained classroom that services students with ED and other conditions. Michael has taught students with ED for 15 years. Michael holds an ED license.

Perceived Preparedness Regarding the Critical Element Areas

Michael shared that he was originally licensed in elementary education. He said he was hired to teach ED with a temporary license. He said he went back and completed his ED license.

He added, "You find out right away when you get an ED class, if they think you're decent at it, there's not getting out." Regarding perception of preparation to implement environmental support, he said, "I was not prepared very well at all." He added, "It was really more of trial and error." He added that currently he has a classroom that has a cooldown area and a padded time out room. He said, "But, I didn't have that when I started." We discussed behavior management and Michael said, "I had to learn to pick my battles and ignore some stuff." He felt that he was somewhat prepared, "but not nearly what I need to be." He added, "But again, when you deal with ED kids it's not like normal." Michael shared that behavior management involved relationship building and the ability to be proactive rather than reactive. He said, "With these kids there was just quite a learning curve." He added, "I really wasn't prepared for the amount of learning I was going to have to do to be effective." The conversation moved to social skills preparedness. Michael felt he was somewhat prepared to teach social skills. He said, "For me the best times are these teachable moments." He felt talking with students was natural to him. He said, "Just helping the kids and talking through the thing and showing them options and all that sort of thing, I wasn't too bad at." Michael added, "To have social skills is just absolutely paramount." The next discussion point was perception of preparedness to teach academics. Michael said, "I was probably pretty prepared. I think the hardest part was really figuring out where these kids truly are academically and going on from that point." He described that students in the same grade were at different levels academically. He laughed and said, "You know you come out of college thinking you've got it figured out and right away you don't have anything figured out." Regarding parent and family involvement, Michael felt he was somewhat prepared. Michael described himself as a "people person" and he felt this aided him in communication with parents and families. He said, "We need to build relationships with their parents." He felt

that building trust was key. He added, "I think in all education that's the gap that we're missing. I think it's relationship building on all levels." Michael discussed his preparation for community supports and shared that it is hard to be prepared because it really depends on your teaching situation. He stressed relationship building with a support opportunity that is available. When asked about preparation to be a qualified professional to teach ED, Michael said, "The hardest thing for me, my first probably three years, was leaving work at work." He teared up and his voice cracked as he said, "I could not get these kids, I couldn't get them out of my mind. And I still can't sometimes." Michael went on to share that someone that will be teaching students with ED needs to have "deep exposure" to their lives and background. He felt that high turnover and "burn out" of teachers of ED had to do with the lack of exposure and understanding of students with ED. He said, "Without the exposure, without knowing what you're going into, there's no way that a young person can look at these situations and cope with these things." He reiterated that it was less about academics and more about understanding, patience, and empathy. He added, "It's hard. It's hard work. It's still hard to talk about sometimes. I don't know what it is in people to make them want to stay in this. It's just so emotionally draining."

Three Preparatory Elements Considered of Highest Importance

Michael felt all the elements were important, but he felt of all things, to be a qualified professional was the most important. He felt that professional would be prepared for the emotional side of the role. He said, "I want people to go into the field, but they have to be prepared for when they get into it." Beyond the course work and licensure, exposure within classrooms that service students with ED would assist creating a qualified professional. He identified behavior management as the second most important critical element. He said, "It's layered deeper than just having a behavior plan in your pocket and knowing what to do with it.

You have to pick your battles wisely and you have to cope with a lot of things that other people

don't have to cope with like being called an MFer or whatever they want to call you and deal

with it in a calm way. Michael felt that environmental support was the third most critical

element. He described having a cool down area, exercise equipment, and a padded time out

room. He shared these had been immensely helpful and necessary to support his students with

ED.

Structural Description: Michael

Perceived Preparedness Regarding the Critical Element Areas

Michael was thoughtful and reflective during the interviewing. He identified himself as

not being well prepared to create environmental supports for students with ED when he began in

the field. He reflected on "trial and error" strategies. Michael felt he was somewhat prepared in

the area of behavior management and that he learned to "pick his battles." He shared that he

wished he had been more prepared in that area. He passionately spoke about the need for

relationship building with students with ED and that solid relationships assisted with the

behavior management. Michael felt that he was somewhat prepared for social skills. Again, he

felt that the positive relationship assisted in social skills. He described using "teachable

moments" when they occurred to build social skills. Regarding academics supports, Michael

described himself as "pretty prepared" for the academic subjects. Michael shared he was not

prepared for the variance in academic levels he would encounter. Michael felt he was a natural

people person, and that parent and family involvement was an area that he was somewhat

prepared for when he started. He stressed the need to build positive relationships with parents.

Community supports was an area that Michael wasn't necessarily prepared for in school. He

added that community supports really depended on the teaching situation and community. He felt

it would be hard to prepare for, but teachers should look for opportunities for their students.

Michael was quite passionate when we discussed the qualified professional. He felt strongly that

any individual embarking on teaching students with ED as a career should know what they are

getting into and have "deep exposure" in the field. He also stressed that the qualified professional

should have an ability to cope with the lives and situation of students with ED. They needed to

be able to build relationships. We were both in tears as he described having to learn how to leave

work at work and that he struggled to "get the kids out of his mind." Beyond the discussion of

the critical elements, Michael's interview revealed themes of lonely and solo, exposure and

experience, perseverance and deflection, and relationships and empathy.

Three Preparatory Elements Considered of Highest Importance

Michael felt the qualified professional with deep exposure and an understanding of what

they will encounter working with students with ED was the most critical element. He felt that

behavior management was the second most important element, and that the behavior

management should align with positive relationship building. He identified physical

environmental supports as the third most critical element.

Composite Textural Description from Participants with ED Licensure

Perceived Preparedness Regarding the Critical Element Areas

All the teacher interview participants with ED licensure discussed having had

opportunities to observe and participate in ED classrooms during their preparatory experiences.

They voiced things like, "I was allowed to observe in many classrooms." Those experiences

provided a variety of information and techniques that guided their approaches to environmental

supports and behavioral management. All teachers with an ED license felt somewhat to very

prepared to provide environmental supports and to provide behavior management. The teachers

shared that they had not received training or preparation in social skills through their college preparation, but they all felt it was a critical component and necessary for student success. As Michael said, "To have social skills is just absolutely paramount." Four of the five candidates felt prepared to provide academic supports to students with ED. Several mentioned the gap of skill levels encountered within the same grade level. Cindy referred to the academic variance as "jaw dropping." Perceived preparation to support parent and family involvement and community supports varied, with only one of the five candidates feeling that they were prepared for those elements.

Three Preparatory Elements Considered of Highest Importance

Four of the five teacher candidates with ED licensure identified behavior management as one of the preparatory elements of highest importance. Many candidates shared behavior management components should include exposure and deeper knowledge. Wanda referred to "psychology and behavior modification." Michael referred to behavior management as "being deeper than just having a behavior plan in your pocket." The candidates felt exposure to actual classrooms that teach students with ED was helpful during their preparation. Four of the five teacher candidates with ED licensure identified preparation in environmental supports for students with ED as critical. The candidates were mixed on the third most important element with two of the five candidates feeling the total qualified professional was key. The elements of social skills and parent and family also identified.

Composite Structural Description from Participants with ED Licensure

Perceived Preparedness Regarding the Critical Element Areas

Critical element areas the candidates perceived they were prepared in included academics and parent and family involvement. Teacher candidates with mild licensure as a body did not

perceive themselves to be prepared in the areas of environmental supports, behavior management, social skills, or community supports. Beyond the college level training, consistent themes from the teacher candidates regarding the total qualified professional included patience, perseverance, ability to deal with loneliness, flexibility, ability to multi-task, ability to collaborate, and the ability to separate from the behavior and not take it personally.

Three Preparatory Elements Considered of Highest Importance

The consolidated responses of candidates identified behavior management and environmental support as two elements of highest importance. Being a qualified professional, social skills, and parental and family involvement were reflected as the third most important elements. The element of community support was felt to be impacted by school location.

Textural-Structural Synthesis from Participants with ED Licensure

The most consistent thread of thought through the interviews with teacher candidates with an ED license regarded experience and exposure. To be prepared to teach students with ED an exposure to all the critical element areas was deemed desirable. Participants discussed student teaching and practicum experiences, observations in a variety of classrooms, and case studies as ways to become more experienced. As Missy stated, "I don't think a book can teach you the horror that some of these kids are living and how they portray that in your classroom." Relationships and empathy were a second structured theme that revealed itself. Participants felt that empathy for students with ED and positive relationship building impacted all the critical element areas. A third structured theme involved perseverance and deflection. Candidates felt it was critical that a teacher of ED would be able to deflect negative words and actions and not internalize them personally. They would have the "perseverance" to push through and have a fresh start each day. A fourth theme of lonely and only revealed itself. Candidates referred often

to the position as isolated, and that the responsibility fell on their shoulders.

Comparison Between Participants with Mild and ED Licensure

Teacher candidates with a mild intervention licensure all longed to know more about the body of "EDness" as Jess stated. They wanted more preparation in behavior management. They felt most prepared for academic supports and parent and family involvement. They were not exposed to social skills training and felt that community supports depended on school location. Qualities of a highly qualified teacher included patience, perseverance, ability to deal with loneliness, ability to be structured, flexibility, ability to multi-task, ability to collaborate, and the ability to separate from the behavior and not take it personally. The structural theme of "trial and error" was referenced in every interview of candidates with mild licensure. Other themes included the theme of lonely and only, empathy and relationships, and deflection and perseverance.

Similarly, the teachers with an ED license also wanted more preparation in behavior management and they wished that their colleagues with mild licensure had more experience and training in the entities of ED and behavior management as well. Teachers with an ED license felt "underprepared" to teach social skills. They felt adequately prepared to provide environment supports. Parent and family involvement and community supports were areas in which they were not necessarily prepared. They felt the qualities of a qualified professional to teach students with ED included patience, structure, relationship building, perseverance, ability to deal with loneliness, ability to multi-task, ability to collaborate, and the ability to separate from the behavior and not take it personally. The structural theme of "experience and exposure" was referenced in every interview of candidates with ED licensure. Other themes revealed included the theme of lonely and only, empathy and relationships, and deflection and perseverance.

The answer to the grand tour question, "Are there differences in the perception of preparedness to teach students with emotional disabilities between teachers having an ED license and teachers with a mild intervention license?" is yes. The teacher candidates had many similar views and passions. The variance included teachers with a mild intervention license did not feel as prepared in the areas of behavior management and environmental supports as the teachers with an ED license. Teachers with an ED license did not feel as prepared for parent and family involvement. Both groups revealed themes of lonely and only, empathy and relationships, and deflection and perseverance. Teachers with a mild intervention license revealed a theme of "trial and error" in each interview. Teachers with an ED license revealed a theme of *experience and exposure* in each interview.

Essence of the Experience

Regarding the critical elements Rhonda said, "It's a tapestry really, and they all weave together and without part of it, there's a blank." The interview candidates' voices also wove together like a tapestry with many like statements, feelings, and revealed themes. The essence of the *lived experience* of teaching students with ED revealed that a larger body of knowledge in all the critical element areas would benefit teachers preparing to teach students with ED.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

Chapter 5 will present a review of findings, implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research. The three key research questions for the dissertation were:

1. What are the perceptions of teachers with a mild intervention license about how well prepared they were for teaching ED?

2. How do the perceptions of teachers with a mild intervention license contrast with the perceptions of ED licensed teachers in regard to preparedness to teach ED?

3. What are the possible implications for the preparation of special education teachers of the emotionally disabled?

This transcendental phenomenological qualitative study involved interviewing five teacher candidates with a mild intervention license and five teacher candidates with an ED license. I earnestly strived to create a bias free state or state of epoche for each interview and through the analysis and writing of the dissertation. Textural descriptions were captured through watching, listening, note taking, and audio recording. These recordings were played back multiple times to decode and capture exact statements and document textural pieces such as voice and emotion. I endeavored to allow my mind to vary the possibilities of meanings through "imaginative variation" and create structured descriptions and allow structural themes to be revealed. Composite textural and structural synthesis resulted in a synthesis of meaning and a final essence

statement of the experience.

Review of Findings

What are the perceptions of teachers with a mild intervention license about how well prepared they were for teaching ED? Environmental supports and the physical layout of the classroom for students with ED was not an area in which the candidates felt prepared. Interviewed candidates shared they also felt unprepared to provide successful behavior management. They uniformly did not have preparatory experience or exposure within a resource classroom or self-contained classroom for students with ED. Most candidates shared they had one or two classes, if any, on emotional disabilities that were elective. They felt unprepared to teach and prepare social skills curriculum. They also felt unprepared for engaging community supports. By contrast, academic supports and parent and family involvement were two areas in which they felt adequately prepared. Themes of lonely and only, deflection and perseverance, and empathy and relationships were revealed. A theme unique to the candidates with a mild intervention license was the theme of trial and error. The trial and error thread was consistent through all the interviews.

How do the perceptions of teachers with a mild intervention license contrast with the perceptions of ED licensed teachers regarding preparedness to teach ED? In general, the candidates with an ED license felt prepared to provide environmental supports and do appropriate behavior management. They felt unprepared to teach and build social skills curriculum. Their responses varied on academic support preparation. Most respondents felt unprepared for parent and family involvement and understanding community supports for students with ED. Themes of lonely and only, deflection and perseverance, and empathy and relationships were revealed. A theme unique to the candidates with an ED license was the theme

of exposure and experience. The candidates referenced their many hands-on opportunities during teacher preparation and within other classrooms as they began to teach.

Implications

What are the possible implications for the preparation of special education teachers of the emotionally disabled? Based on the perception of preparedness to teach students with ED from the interview candidates, it appears that more experience and exposure to behavior management strategies, environmental support strategies, and social skills strategies are needed. The interviewed candidates placed highest emphasis on behavior management and understanding components that embody ED.

The study implied that a larger general body of information regarding students with ED is needed for teachers of ED. Components on the history of teaching students with ED, physiology of students with ED, identification of students with ED, and remediation of students with ED would help prepare teachers to understand and facilitate strategies more effectively with students and their families. This larger global knowledge regarding ED could assist teachers of ED in all the critical element areas outlined by Simpson et al. (2011).

Regarding behavior management, the candidate interviews implied this was a key critical element. Responsive techniques in classroom management need to be based on theory and best practice strategies (Ficarra & Quinn, 2014). Strategies and techniques to teach and build positive behaviors such as using tangible token economies, group and individual behavior contracts, group and individual reinforcement, and contingent praise would be worthwhile in preparing teachers of ED. Strategies for decreasing undesired behaviors could include instruction and preparatory exposure and experience in specific time out from reinforcement, response-cost, performance feedback, and planned ignoring would also be optimal. Learning best practice

guidance on classroom rules, procedures, review, and rehearsal would aid teachers of ED. Exposure and experience in behavior management would support teachers of ED.

Souders (2015) discussed that a structured classroom is a support for students with ED. Preparation in best practice strategies for various environmental supports would be recommended. This would include the physical layout of the classroom, proximity guidance, understanding of seclusion and time out areas and procedures, and flexible options for students. Understanding a variety of supports and entities available in the physical classroom environment would assist teachers in supporting their students with ED and is recommended.

Responsive social skills strategies should also be based on research and best practice strategies. Simpson et al. (2011) noted, "In a fashion parallel to having an effective behavior management and behavior support system, we consider ongoing social skills and social interaction training to be an essential feature of an effective EBD [*sic*] program" (p. 236). Gresham (1998) noted that the most effective social skills training consisted of direct teaching of face to face skills involving modeling, coaching, and reinforcement. Social skills curriculum and techniques that address the topics of asking for help, solving conflicts, and alternatives to aggression would help teachers of ED more effectively teach social skills. Exposure and experience in social skills curriculum development and delivery are recommended.

Having preparatory experiences in a variety of classroom settings with intentional observation of behavior management techniques, physical classroom layouts, and social skills instruction would help create a more solid foundational understanding of how to set up these supports for students with ED proactively. This type of preparation could potentially provide the "experience and exposure" needed to move away from repeated and failed "trial and error" methods. The theme of "lonely and only" was revealed, and it may imply that teachers of ED

need restorative and connective practices in place to support them. Due to the nature of the ED teacher role, ways for teachers to connect and restore themselves to support the mental health and well-being of their students as well as themselves could be introduced during the preparatory experience. As Michael said, "Without the exposure, without knowing what you're going into, there's no way that a young person can look at these situations and cope with these things." All candidates felt that working with students with ED was essential and critical and that preparatory experiences could guide new teachers to work in the field. Further research on key effective and research-based practices for teaching and pre-service training for ED continues to need to be conducted.

Limitations

Creswell (2007) noted, "A phenomenology provides a deep understanding of a phenomenon as experienced by several individuals" (p. 82). In this study, as in other qualitative studies, the components of trustworthiness, consistency, reliability, and validity were dependent on the primary investigator and their adherence to the guiding research tenets of the phenomenology. I do have a background as a teacher of students with ED. I have an ED license and received my initial preparatory training during the end of the categorical era. To the best of my ability, I tried to bracket away this history and approach this study in a state of epoche. I had an open mindedness to see what would appear. I bracketed away other information such as where teacher candidates went to college and their school corporations. The amount of material gathered in this type of study is weighty and quickly become unwieldy. I looked at several transcendental phenomenological studies to see how the participant information was compiled and how the index was outlined. To quote Cindy, "The variance was jaw dropping." I could have opted to have one voice of teachers with a mild intervention license and one voice of teachers

with an ED license. However, I felt that the individual voices gave more depth, meaning, and validity to the study. The index and finding categories and subheadings then became somewhat redundant and repetitive, but this format did aid in keeping each voice documented and analyzed in the same consistent manner. The study had semi-structured interviews that encompassed the critical elements. The critical elements were themes within themselves. It was difficult to stretch the imaginative variation creatively when the topics were somewhat scripted. Through the horizontaling process, several other themes and codes revealed themselves, and I consolidated and documented the structural themes that emerged that seemed persistent, significant, and relevant. A different primary investigator may have interpreted information differently regarding the structural themes.

Recommendations for Further Research

Best practice for students with emotional disabilities is an area ripe for study. Specific research in the areas of behavioral management, social skills, or physical environmental supports could be greatly beneficial to guide preparatory training. Research on successful and resilient students with ED would be insightful. Research on crisis prevention and crisis rehearsal could be helpful. Understanding the restorative and supportive needs of teachers with ED could benefit current and potential teachers of ED. Research on Carl Roger's (1957) core conditions and whether they support rapport building with students with ED would be intriguing.

The voices of categorical special education teachers will be disappearing in the next few years and capturing their lived experiences could yield value to the body of literature regarding ED and teacher preparatory programs. Further research on the lived experiences of teachers of ED in self-contained or day treatment programs could guide teacher preparatory programs in the

area of experience and exposure. Teachers of ED are a rare commodity and their documented

and researched lived experiences are essential to guide future teachers of ED.

Closing Essence Statement

Moustakas (1994) noted, "In a broad sense, that which appears provides the impetus for

experience and for generating knowledge" (p. 26). The teacher candidates volunteered to

participate and share their lived experiences regarding ED with me in a passionate and

purposeful way. It would be my hope that their experiences can in some way guide the

preparation of new teachers that endeavor to teach students with ED.

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APPENDIX A: LETTER TO SPECIAL EDUCATION DIRECTORS

<div align="right">Date:</div>

Dear (Director of Special Education),

My name is Patty Eaton and I am a student from the Educational Leadership doctoral program at Indiana State University. I have previously worked with students with emotional disabilities and I am working on a qualitative research study about the perceived level of preparedness to teach emotionally disturbed (ED) students. I am seeking teachers currently teaching ED students in either a self-contained or resource classroom because they understand the lived experience of working with ED students.

Those that teach ED students are a rare commodity. I would be very pleased if you would assist me by providing the school email contact for current teachers of students with ED. If you have any questions about the study, please email pspier@indstate.edu or contact me by cell phone at 812-229-9151.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Patty Eaton

APPENDIX B: LETTER TO STUDY CANDIDATES

Date:

Dear (teacher candidate),

My name is Patty Eaton and I am a student from the Educational Leadership doctoral program at Indiana State University. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study about the perceived level of preparedness to teach emotionally disturbed (ED) students. I have previously taught ED students in a self-contained classroom and feel we share this lived experience. You are eligible to be in this study because you currently teach ED students in either a self-contained or resource classroom and understand the lived experience of working with ED students. I obtained your contact information from the Director of Special Education in your district.

If you decide to participate in this study, you are asked to commit to two interviews with me. I will be audio recording and note taking to ensure I have a clear understanding of your statements and perceptions. Interviews are anticipated to be 60-90 minutes and will take place at a location of your choosing.

Those that teach ED students are a rare commodity. I would be very pleased if you would like to participate in my study; however, your commitment is completely voluntary. If you'd like to participate or have any questions about the study, please email pspier@indstate.edu or contact me by cell phone at 812-229-9151.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Patty Eaton

APPENDIX C: IRB CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

PREPARATION FOR TEACHING STUDENTS WITH EMOTIONAL DISABILITIES:
A COMPARISON OF PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS WITH A MILD INTERVENTION
LICENSE AND TEACHERS WITH AN EMOTIONAL DISABILITY LICENSE

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Patricia Eaton and Dr. Terry McDaniel, from the Department of Educational Leadership at Indiana State University. The study is being conducted as part of doctoral dissertation. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

You have been asked to participate in this study because of your unique experience with students with emotional disabilities (ED). The study is comprised of understanding the lived experiences of teachers of the emotionally disabled in self-contained or resource room settings.

This study will specifically focus on the perceived level of preparedness to teach ED students by comparing perceptions of teachers with a mild intervention license to the perceptions of teachers with an ED license based on preparatory experiences for the required licensure.

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following things:

- Share general licensing information.
- Commit to a minimum of two interviews (each 60-90 minutes) with the researcher, understanding that tape recording and note taking will be utilized in the process of validly

collecting information about the lived experience of teaching ED.

- Candidates must sign an informed consent form which also denotes an understanding that information will be securely maintained for three years and will be kept secure in a locked flash drive of information.

The study poses very minimal risk to subjects. The probability/magnitude of risk is not greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine activities.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of securing notes and data in a locked flash drive of information. Recorded and transcribed interviews will also be kept secure for a minimum of three years.

You can choose whether or not to be in this study. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact the principal investigator, Patricia Eaton, or faculty sponsor, Dr. Terry McDaniel.

Patricia Eaton   Dr. Terry McDaniel

812-229-9151   812-237-3862

pspier@sycamores.indstate.edu   tmcdaniel@indstate.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Indiana State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) by mail at Indiana State University, Office of Sponsored Programs, Terre Haute, IN 47809, by phone at (812) 237-8217, or e-mail the IRB at irb@indstate.edu. You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members

of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with ISU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

_____

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____

Printed Name of Subject

_____   _____

Signature of Subject   Date

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEW 1

Interview Questions for Interview 1

Interviewer script: My study involves interviewing teachers who share the experience of teaching students with ED. Today's interview is based on a variety of aspects of ED programming. There are seven essential elements as described by Simpson, Peterson, & Smith (2011) in their article, "Critical Educational Program Components for Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders: Science, Policy, and Practice". I ask that you reflect and share wholly and candidly about your perception of preparedness regarding each element.

1. Environmental supports

2. Behavior management

3. Social skills

4. Academic support

5. Parent and family involvment

6. Community support

7. Qualified professionals

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEW 2

Interview Questions for Interview 2

Interviewer script: This second and final interview will begin with a review of the transcript from the first interview. Any desired additions to provide the most trustworthy interview findings will be completed during the concluding thoughts portion of this interview. An open-ended question will be asked regarding what preparatory elements would be of highest importance in preparing to teach students with ED. Qualitative research allows the researcher to understand the lived experience of individuals. Moustakas (1994) notes, "In a broad sense, that which appears provides the impetus for experience and for generating knowledge" (p. 26).

1. Concluding thoughts on your perception of preparedness to teach ED?

2. What three preparatory elements do you perceive would be of highest importance in preparing to teach students with ED?