STUDENT VOICE REFLECTING SCHOOL EXPERIENCES FOR STUDENTS
WITH EMOTIONAL DISTURBANCE WHO HAVE EXHIBITED
AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR IN THE SCHOOL SETTING

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Dissertation

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ABSTRACT

Inclusion is an accepted practice in public schools. However, research shows students with emotional disturbance (ED) may face challenges in the inclusion classroom students with other disabilities may not encounter. Inclusion teachers may be apprehensive including students with ED in their classroom, as behavioral outbursts may disrupt class and interfere with the learning of others. Disciplinary consequences such as corrective learning or suspensions may mean students with emotional disturbance fall behind academically in the classroom, causing them danger of failing classes and dropping out of school without earning a diploma.

Previous research conducted on inclusion primarily looked to administrators, teachers, and parents for strategies on effective teaching. This study sought to identify educational practices high school students with emotional disturbance and aggressive behavior perceive as desirable educational practices in inclusion classrooms. Through student voice, participants expressed their preferences in teachers’ teaching styles and described positive structuring of the classroom environment. Students also identified discipline/classroom management practices that aided students in keeping calm, focused, and on-task in school.

Case study methodology was employed for this research, using techniques associated with qualitative data collection: participant observation, interviews, free list
and pile sort, and document collection. Final analysis of data found student perceptions of favorable components of a teacher’s teaching style to be the teacher’s relationship and interactions with students, as well as characteristics such as patience, humor, helpfulness, and fairness. Students identified constructive ways of structuring the classroom by ensuring class work is helpful, interesting, and meaningful. Positive discipline strategies listed by students included eliminating unessential rules, developing a positive bond between teacher and students, and identifying ways to help students when they are having a “bad day.” However, approaches could not be generalized as each child had unique perceptions of favorable practices. This supports the foundation of relationship-driven teaching, whereby teachers develop a stronger connection with students by knowing each individually.

Student voice allows active involvement, and increases the likelihood of participants feeling empowered by being heard. This study will also potentially help educators examine policies and procedures for students, especially those identified with emotional disturbance.
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated with love to all the children who have touched my life, especially my own children, Jeremy and Ali.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

When a student is struggling with academic and/or behavioral concerns in school, a teacher or parent may refer the child for testing by the multifactored evaluation team. The team will assess various areas such as academics, motor skills, social and emotional functioning, and language development. Then, this team of school personnel including teachers, the principal, the psychologist, guidance counselor, and the speech therapist invite the parent to a meeting to determine whether the student should be identified as needing special educational services. Thus, students who receive special education services are identified through an educational assessment and team decision process.

One category of special education disability is termed “emotional disturbance.” According to the Operating Standards for Ohio’s Schools Serving Children with Disabilities 2002 manual, criteria for this diagnosis include an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory or health factors, an inability to maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers, inappropriate types of behaviors or feelings under normal circumstances, a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression, and/or a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems. One or more of these characteristics must
be exhibited over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child’s educational performance. In addition, it must be determined that the disability is not a function of social maladjustment. If the team decides this diagnosis fits the student, the child is identified as demonstrating emotional disturbance. An Individual Education Plan (IEP) is written that lists academic, social, and behavioral goals for the student. The IEP also lists the least restrictive environment (LRE) where these goals will be worked on, either with special education personnel in a special education classroom or in a general education classroom with supports and accommodations (called inclusion).

With the passage of Public Law 94-142 in 1975, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) passed in 1990, and reauthorized in 1997 and as PL108-446 Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) in 2004, and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislative initiatives, services for students with special needs became less restrictive, meaning that students with special needs were kept in with the general student population as much as possible. When these federal guidelines were put in place to monitor special education and related services for students with special needs, students with special needs moved from small special education classrooms into the regular classroom ("Defining IDEA," 2005).

Inclusion of students with disabilities into the general education classroom has not been without controversy, and many studies have been done on the implications of inclusion (Chow, Blais, & Hemingway, 1999; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994; Ritter, Michel, & Irby, 1999). Most studies focus on inclusion from the perspectives of educators and parents. Specifically, many studies investigate variables of teacher training and support
needed for a successful inclusion program. These studies utilized teachers’ and administrators’ input about support and training needed by general education teachers. General education teachers asked for support in the implementation of inclusive classrooms including teacher training to help students with disabilities, personnel support in providing teachers of students with special needs to help in the general education classroom, materials and resources to remediate disabilities, lowered class size for better student-teacher ratio, and consideration of severity so that inclusion would not hold back general education students from success in the classroom (Friend & Bursuck, 2002; Peterson & Hittie, 2003; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1966). Studies have also investigated parental expectations and hopes for students with special needs included in the regular classroom. Parents may identify increasing students’ confidence, and teachers providing interventions to accommodate special learning needs as among the most important factors necessary for positive experiences for students in inclusive classrooms (Ritter et al., 1999).

Few studies have been conducted focusing on the perceptions of students who are identified as emotionally disturbed (ED) and of what might make the inclusive classroom a successful educational placement for them. Crowley’s study (1993) examined those teacher strategies that students with ED valued and that promoted better peer relationships. In order to obtain this information, she interviewed six adolescent students with ED. Jahnukainen (2000), of Finland, interviewed students with emotional disturbance 10 years after they left school to find out their feelings about participation in special education classes. Davidson (1999) identified differences in social interactions between individuals in special education classes and those
students in general education classes. These youths were asked to determine strategies that could be used by educators to minimize these differences. Two other studies, by Greco (1993) and Garlick (1990), address the perceptions of the emotionally disturbed student in the classroom about what makes an ideal teacher. None of these studies, however, asks student participants to provide strategies for structuring the classroom environment to help students with acting out and aggressive behavior to remain calm, focused, and on-task. This area of concern is of paramount importance to teachers working with students who are ED because volatile behavior can disrupt learning for all students in the classroom.

In addition to obtaining valuable information about classroom strategies, encouraging students to express their opinions allows them an opportunity for self-reflection and a feeling of empowerment. Information may be obtained by the Socratic method that develops increasingly reflective answers as dialogue proceeds (Lincoln, 1995). In this method, students must be patiently encouraged to express their “voice” which emerges in a relationship that encourages active listening, probing, and brainstorming. Lincoln (1995) argues that the researcher helps the students move into deeper analysis of school experiences and looks for patterns or structures of which they may not be consciously aware. There are many reasons for listening to students’ voices. Adults often underestimate the ability of children to be shrewd observers and to possess insight about what they see and hear. Students with disabilities are critical stakeholders in their education. Their experiences are as valid as those of educators and parents.
In addition, students with emotional disturbance are at-risk and in danger of dropping out without graduating. Teachers need to develop strategies to help them be successful in school. When researchers ask students directly, students can have a voice in planning their educational programming rather than being passive recipients of other people’s decisions about their lives (Hapner & Imel, 2002). This provides valuable information to educators.

Purpose of the Study

While great strides have been made, progress in inclusion may be a function of the type of disability. For example, according to Bang (1993), general education teachers have gradually become more receptive to having students with certain types of disabilities in their classrooms. This acceptance may be due to increased training on meeting the academic and educational needs of students with special needs. These teachers then feel better equipped to provide a quality education program to students with special needs (Bang, 1993). However, research shows that even students with severely restricted intellectual functioning are more welcomed into regular classrooms than the students who have emotional disturbance (Baker, 2005; Safran & Safran, 1984; 1985; Vidoni, Fleming, & Mintz, 1983). Educators tend to become personally involved in the progress of students who have academic rather than behavioral problems. While teachers’ understanding of academic needs has improved, their skills with behavioral intervention often times continue to be limited. When regular teachers are asked to choose the category of disability they want in their classrooms, they tend to reject those students with behavior problems (Jahnukainen, 1999; Moberg, 1998). Students with emotional and behavioral concerns may be perceived as being potentially disruptive to
the rest of the students in the classroom. They are often seen as interfering in the learning environment and lowering the learning potential of all students. These behavioral “rejection students” could require a great deal of teachers’ time and efforts (Cook et al., 2000). Teachers may ask, “What is the point of placing a student with emotional disturbance into a full inclusion classroom when he or she will disrupt the class and hence the education of others while deriving little benefit?” (Chow, 1999, p. 461).

Despite these apprehensions, inclusion is a supported practice in public schools, with most students with disabilities spending the majority of their time in the regular classroom (“Defining IDEA,” 2005). Teachers need to follow the IEP which mandates the least restrictive environment. This legal document is written by a team of professional educators including the principal, teachers of students with special needs, general education teachers, the school psychologist, the counselor, and possibly the special education supervisor. Some school districts are choosing to allow the student with ED to attend the IEP meeting so he/she also has a voice in determining his/her educational goals. Once the IEP is signed, it becomes a legal document and needs to be followed so the school district is compliant with the law. If the IEP lists the least restrictive environment for the student as inclusion in a general education classroom, general education teachers must include these students in their general education classrooms.

When a student has behaviors that include acting out or aggression that may disrupt the entire classroom, teachers need strategies to proactively avert these behaviors and to de-escalate disturbance. There are many different types of behavioral
strategies which are successful with students with emotional disturbance. While part of the role of the teacher of students with special needs is to help general education teachers in identifying and initiating techniques for behavior management, students with ED are rarely asked by teachers what helps them in the classroom. Students and teachers would both benefit if students could collaborate with teachers and identify ways to keep them focused on learning.

This study allows students a voice in evaluating their educational programming through reflection and examination of teacher strategies and methods. Through this reflection, students identified strategies they felt had been beneficial for them. Students may also have felt empowered when asked to give insight into instructional approaches that benefit them. Their voice may provide the missing link between students and educators.

This study potentially adds the voice of students in helping educators examine polices and procedures for students, especially those identified with emotional disturbance, whose educational services include inclusion in a general education classroom. As students are able to voice their preferences concerning the educational environment, teaching strategies, and discipline procedures, educators are afforded the opportunity to learn what can help in making students with emotional disturbance more successful in school. This could help both students and teachers in the general education class benefit from a calmer learning environment.

**Statement of the Problem/Research Framework**

It was the intention of this study to describe factors that students with emotional disturbance, specifically those with aggressive behavior, deem favorable and
unfavorable in helping them to be successful learners in the school setting. This study used qualitative methods to get rich, deep information that is insightful and of interest to educators. High school students were chosen to participate in this study based on the following qualifications: age 14-19 years old; identified for at least 1 year with a special education classification of emotional disturbance; at least one documented aggressive behavior within the last year, either verbal and/or physical; and inclusion in at least one general education classroom.

At the large suburban school district where the research project took place, the available population of participants who qualified was small, only nine subjects. Students were observed in inclusion classes and then interviewed three to five times during a 50-minute class period until it was believed the data accumulated thoroughly answered the research questions. Their perceptions concerning teaching styles, methods of instruction, and discipline and classroom management practices were discussed at length. Semi-structured interview questions were adapted to reflect particular conversation topics determined by the volunteer participants. The questions served as a guide rather than a formal, orally administered survey. This type of qualitative interviewing used an emergent design, meaning that the topics for questioning changed as insight was gained into the concerns of students.

The qualitative method of research gives access to the human voice, which has not previously been adequately accessed by this population of students. Allowing students a voice encourages empowerment by allowing them reflection and self-analysis. Telling their stories facilitates examination of their role as students through an emic, or first person, perspective. As they reflected on their behavior in the classroom,
they may have determined what elicits an outburst or what practices allowed them to stay in control. The research also provides a framework for general education teachers that may aid teachers in being successful with students who demonstrate emotional disturbance. Thus, the qualitative method leads to a statement of the needs of students as a way to provide input into their academic environment.

Case study research provides description of the phenomenon through the emic perspective of the participants. The researcher utilizes the data to describe the actions and statements of the students, then examines the data for themes, assertions and interpretations concerning the perceptions of students with emotional disturbance about their educational environment (Creswell, 1998). These themes are then analyzed and interpreted by the researcher to better understand the questions under consideration.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to use the voice of high school students identified with emotional disturbance to identify their perceptions of positive and/or negative teacher behaviors and teaching strategies in the classroom. High school students with emotional disturbance were questioned to determine what they perceive to be successful educational practices. Specific research questions regarding educational programming that were investigated were:

1. According to students who are identified as demonstrating ED, what components of a teacher’s teaching style are considered positive and/or negative strategies in working with students with severe emotional disturbance?

2. According to students with ED, how can the classroom environment be structured to best help the student learn?
3. According to the student with ED, what specific discipline/classroom management practices aid in keeping the student focused on learning?

**Operational Definitions**

Definitions with an asterisk are taken from the *Operating Standards for Ohio’s Schools Serving Children with Disabilities 2002* manual.

*Accommodation* means a modification to the method of instruction that does not significantly change the difficulty of the curriculum. An example would be giving a child fewer math problems than other students receive (Switlick, 1997).

*Adaptation* means a modification to the method of instruction that changes the difficulty of the curriculum. An example is having a child identify the main characters of a story while other students focus also on plots, subplots, and resolution (Switlick, 1997).

*Aggressive behavior* in this study is being defined as behavior—verbal, nonverbal, or physical—that injures another indirectly or directly and/or results in extraneous gains for the aggressor (Zirpoli, 2005).

*At Risk* is used to describe students who have characteristics, live in conditions, or have experiences that make them more likely than others to experience failure in schools (Friend & Bursuck, 2002).

*Bidding* is when someone makes an attempt at interpersonal interactions with another (Gottman & DeClaire, 2001).

*Case study research* is the in-depth study of instances of a phenomenon in its natural context and from the perspective of the participants involved in the phenomenon (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003).
Collaboration means a style of interaction professionals use in order to accomplish a goal they share, often stressed in inclusive schools (Friend & Bursuck, 2002).

Continuum of Alternative Placements* means the availability of different types of educational environments, including, but not limited to:

a) regular classes
b) supplemental services (such as resource room or itinerant services provided in conjunction with the regular class environment
c) special classes
d) special schools
e) home instruction
f) hospitals
g) institutions

Curriculum means a structured, systematic approach to teaching skills and the techniques for teaching them (Bear, 2005).

De-escalate means when one helps another avoid anger and/or channel it more positively (Glenn, 2002).

Efficacy means an individual’s confidence about his or her abilities (Alderman, 2004).

Emergent design means the practice of changing the design of an evaluation as the evaluator gains new insights into the concerns and issues of the stakeholders (Gall et al., 2003).
Emic means the research participants’ perceptions and understanding of their social reality (Gall et al., 2003).

Emotional disturbance is a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child’s educational performance:

a) an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors and is not due to social maladjustment.

b) an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers.

c) inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances

d) a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression

e) a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems

The term includes schizophrenia. The term does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance. Also known as severe emotional disturbance, severe behavior handicap, or behavior disorder.

For the purpose of this study, ED will only include students who exhibit overt aggressive behavior.

Emotional First Aid is a strategy used by teachers when a student is in a crisis situation to decrease frustration while maintaining communication during stress (Long, 1990).

Emotional Intelligence means the ability to consider options before reacting to a stressful situation (Goleman, 1995).
Empathy means the ability to feel or experience the same or similar emotion as another person (Bear, 2005).

Etic means the researcher’s understanding of the research participants’ social reality (Gall et al., 2003).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) means P.L. 101-476. This act was passed in 1990, reauthorized in 1997 and as PL 108-446 in 2004 to incorporate No Child Left Behind. It ensures that students with disabilities receive special education and related services (“Defining IDEA,” 2005).

Inclusion means the process of including children with special needs in the regular classroom setting with accommodations and supports (Friend & Bursuck, 2002). For the purpose of this study, inclusion will mean the process of including students with special needs in the regular classroom setting (with or without accommodations and support.)

Individualized Education Program (IEP)* is a written statement for a child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in a meeting in accordance with rule 33301-51-07 of the Administrative Code.

IEP Team* is a group of individuals that is responsible for developing, reviewing, or revising an IEP for a child with a disability.

Intervention* means a process that focuses upon a specific concern that affects the learner’s progress within a learning environment.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)* means that, to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not disabled; and
that special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the general educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.

*Life Space Intervention* is using conflict as an opportunity for intervention by allowing a student to talk out his frustration (Fecser & Long, 1998).

*Mainstreaming* means placing students with disabilities in general education settings when they can meet academic expectations with minimal assistance (Friend & Bursuck, 2002).

*Member Checking* occurs in qualitative research when research participants judge the accuracy and completeness of statements made in the researcher’s report (Gall et al., 2003).

*Modifications* means individualized expectations set for students with disabilities based on IEP objectives (Friend & Bursuck, 2002).

*Multi-factored Evaluation (MFE)* means an evaluation, conducted by a multidisciplinary team, of more than one area of a child’s functioning so that no procedure shall be the sole criterion for determining an appropriate educational program placement. This process shall be designed to assure that children are not misclassified or unnecessarily labeled as being disabled because of inappropriate selection, administration, or interpretation of evaluation materials and shall be implemented in accordance with federal and state laws and regulations.
Public Law 94-142 means legislation passed in 1975 which set federal guidelines for special education and related services and the procedures for establishing and monitoring them (Friend & Bursuck, 2002).

Qualitative Research means inquiry that is grounded in the assumption that individuals construct social reality in the form of meanings and interpretations, and that these constructions tend to be transitory and situational. The dominant methodology is to discover these meanings and interpretations by studying cases intensively in natural settings and by subjecting the resulting data to analytic induction (Gall et al., 2003).

Relationship-Driven Teaching occurs when teachers enhance students’ motivation to learn by focusing on fulfilling fundamental emotional needs (Rogers & Renard, 1999).

Special Education* means specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability, including instruction conducted in the classroom, in the home, in hospitals and institutions, and in other settings, and instruction in physical education.

Triangulation means the use of multiple data-collection methods, data sources, analysts, or theories as corroborative evidence for the validity of qualitative research findings (Gall et al., 2003).

Voice means when an individual is able to express his/her experiences and perceptions to show beliefs and attitudes (Dey, 2005).

Theoretical Framework

A common characteristic in children with ED is aggressive and oppositional personality that leads to maladaptive behavior (Chandler & Jones, 2001). A variety of
factors influence the demonstration of inappropriate behavior in the school setting, and these behaviors can take many forms. Aggression can be exhibited both physically and verbally, and aggression leads to disruption of interpersonal relationships. Bandura (1973) uses social learning theory to explain that children learn by observing others and modeling their behavior. He explores origins of aggression as occurring through observation, direct experience, and practice shaped by consequences. Thus, it may be inferred that the child with emotional disturbance may demonstrate more appropriate behavior in a setting where there are good role models. Other factors relating to development of aggression are explored by Martin and Anderson (1996) and Menna and Landey (2001), who examine personality structures. Their research finds that when a child exhibits high assertiveness and low empathy, behavioral disabilities result. Beck (1999) explores environmental factors and cognitive distortions that play a strong role in the development of patterns of aggressive behavior. There is also evidence that supports the conclusion that genetic influence plays a substantial role in the origins of psychological traits such as aggression (Bouchard, 2004). Current studies defend the etiology of antisocial behaviors as a result of interactions between biology and environment (Pine & Cohen, 1999).

Students with ED are referred for special education services because they have problems developing and maintaining interpersonal relationships. They exhibit inappropriate behaviors that disrupt their own learning and that of their peers, so teachers may utilize a variety of strategies to increase appropriate behavior. Social skill training can aid students with ED in learning new behaviors to replace negative and inappropriate actions. Cognitive behavior therapy (Beck, 1976, 1999; Beck & Emery,
1985; Burns, 1990) and rational emotive therapy (Ellis & Bernard, 1983; Ellis & Grieger, 1986) were investigated as methods to change behaviors that lead to difficulty in developing and maintaining interpersonal relationships. If faulty thought processes (cognition) that lead to inappropriate behavior are remedied, appropriate actions and emotions will occur. According to Beck (1999), the importance of a good self-concept, a sense of efficacy, and empathy training also are important in modifying aggressive behavior of children with ED. Tactics that help students who need to be calmed were investigated, such as “emotional first aid” (Long, 1990) and “life space intervention (Fecser & Long, 1998) “as participants in this study were asked for specific strategies they feel help them to stay calm, focused, and on-task.

“Teachers need to condition the environment so learning takes place by the actions of the learners” (White, 1995, p. 71). A discipline structure needs to be in place so that knowledge occurs for all students in the classroom. Discipline models in schools are most frequently based on the operant conditioning paradigm developed by Skinner (1938; 1953; 1957.) Operant conditioning proposes that behavior is increased by reinforcement and decreased by punishment which leads to some behavior management strategies currently used in schools. Level systems commonly found in programs for the student with ED are based upon this model where students who exhibit appropriate behavior are rewarded with privileges. Misbehavior results in an immediate loss of reward or implementation of some punishment and moving them to a lower, less privileged level. Common discipline models used by general education teachers, such as Canter’s Assertive Discipline (1976), were examined for operant conditioning strategies used in classroom behavior management. Bandura’s (1973)
social learning theory examined motivation and its relationship to rewards and punishments. Students were asked what discipline strategies they felt motivated them to behave appropriately in class, and what specific approaches led them to resist the structure imposed by the teacher. These research participants discussed classroom rewards and punishments and their effectiveness in changing behavior. They offered insight into their perceptions of an effective, structured school environment.

The belief in social learning theory is that the teacher’s personality is the critical component in setting the stage for learning because an effective teacher creates an environment of hope in the classroom (Bandura, 1973). Glasser (1965) believes that the teacher should take on the role of problem-solver to be most effective with students. He cites reasons for school failure that lead to student discipline problems and pragmatic ways that the classroom teacher can remedy these problems. This leads to a discussion of relationship-driven teaching (Rogers & Renard, 1999) in which teachers fulfill the emotional needs of students, enhancing students’ motivations to learn. When teachers care about their students personally, show respect and offer choices, they foster relationships which lead to learner engagement. The empathetic teacher establishes rapport and a caring relationship which invokes dramatic changes in student behavior, effort, and performance. The students must perceive that teachers care for them as individuals (Mendes, 2003). Humor in the classroom was investigated (Maloney, 1998), as a way to change student expectations of and interactions with perceived authority figures. Humor was also considered as a way to appropriately redirect agitation and create a pleasant learning environment (Forbes, 1997).
This study considered the historical path of inclusion from PL 94-142 in 1975 to the present IDEIA Act of 2004 which guarantees the right for all children to an education in the least restrictive environment and how this relates to classroom climate as perceived by students with ED. In addition, perceptions of educators, parents, and students will be examined relating to benefits and drawbacks for the student with special needs included in a general education class.

Despite theories of etiology of emotional disturbance and what constitutes positive classroom climate by professional educators and parents, little attention has been paid to what students believe to be important. The value of students having a voice in their education will be investigated. Giving students a voice in sharing their perspectives of education is an attempt to empower them by allowing them the opportunity to reflect on their lives at school. Through this self-reflection, they will identify positive components of their schooling experience that lead to a successful academic environment. It also allows opportunities for connectedness with an adult through dialogue on a personal level. It will hopefully exemplify those theories of etiology and what constitutes a positive classroom climate through the voice of the student rather than the researcher. Techniques of qualitative research will be examined, including a rationale for case study research as the best method of accessing student voice in this research study. The case study approach will guide data generation and descriptions of the students’ perceptions which will then be studied for themes. It is anticipated that factors that maximize success in inclusive settings for students with ED will be identified.
Delimitations

A delimitation of this study is that students surveyed are from one suburban high school in the Midwest area. These students are between the ages of 14-19, are identified as having emotional disturbance for at least one year, are included in at least one general education class, and have documented aggression.

Limitations

A limitation of this study was the fact that only a small population of students were available that met the criteria of age 14-19, identified as having emotional disturbance for at least 1 year, inclusion in at least one general education class, and documented history of aggression. These student participants related in-depth feelings and perceptions of their school history which may or may not be representative of a larger population. As in all self-reported data, these high school students with ED may have intentionally or unintentionally misrepresented their memories of past school experiences to the interviewer.

Another limitation was the researcher’s time constraints with most observations and interviews to be done during first through fifth periods (7:20-11:50 a.m.), rarely during sixth, seventh and eighth periods. One student recommended for the study had to be eliminated because his inclusion class and periods for interviews fell during sixth and seventh periods when the researcher was unable to visit the site. Student participants were enrolled in a limited number of general education classes and observations preferred were those done in classes deemed most academic (example: math chosen over health; health chosen over P. E., etc.).
Summary

Students with emotional disturbance were given a voice in this research. Through interviews, school high school students related both positive and negative educational experiences by sharing historical background about teachers they liked and who were helpful to them personally. Teacher style, educational strategies, and behavior management techniques and aspects of the classroom environment that are seen as motivating were detailed. Components that are helpful in keeping students focused and on-task in the regular classroom were discussed, as well as those strategies and structures students felt were not helpful to their learning. Through this self-disclosure, participants may feel empowered by identifying approaches that benefit students in the classroom regarding teacher style, classroom methods and discipline practices.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Characteristics of Children with Emotional Disturbance

Literature bases about these theories and perspectives inform the research in various ways. First, development of aggression as well as ways to limit aggression in students with ED through cognitive therapy and social skills training will be considered. Discipline approaches within classroom management will be examined for strategies in keeping the student who acts out and behaves aggressively calm, focused and on-task. Also, theories will provide added frameworks to determine what factors in the classroom environment as well as qualities of a teacher’s teaching style have been successful in the classroom for students with emotional disturbance. Perceptions of school professionals and parents involved throughout the history of inclusion for students with emotional disturbance need to be examined to analyze success and failure from the student perspective. Likewise, research accessing student voice that shows students’ perceptions about educational programming will give insight into strategies that work well these students.

Origins of Aggression

Experts have some disagreement on a definitive definition of “emotional disturbance,” although they have identified some factors that lead to a child having
maladaptive behavior. Elias, Gara, Rothbaum, Reese, and Ubriaco (1987) state that students with ED are distinguished by observable behavior and the disturbing nature of behavior to peers and authority figures. From the perspective of developmental psychopathology, a child’s overt behavior may be defined as maladaptive responses to interpersonal situations (Garmezy & Rutter, 1983). Chandler and Jones (2001) believe that if students become aggressive or oppositional in interpersonal relationships with peers and authority figures, and the behavior is severe enough, the child may be identified as emotionally disturbed (ED) and would require special education services at school. Researchers explore many different causes of violence and aggression which are common personality characteristics in children with ED.

**Modeling**

Bandura’s (1973) social learning theory describes one origin of aggression as coming from observation. Modeling is learning through observation when children observe others behaving in a physically and verbally aggressive manner. Parents and/or significant others with whom a child associates show certain types of behavior that their children learn most thoroughly after they are repeatedly observed. Identification is firmly established early in the child’s life and then predetermines the direction of later developments. Children then model or acquire these patterns of behavior from watching the adults around them. Serbin and Karp (2003) believe aggressive social behavior seems to be learned from problematic parenting by adults with the same style.

During early childhood years, when a child models parental disciplinary activities this influences the child’s interpersonal behavior with others. Hoffman (1960) found that mothers who forced compliance with their demands through verbal
and physical aggression had children who employed similar aggressive tactics in controlling the behavior of their peers. When a parent uses corporal punishment, the child fears the parent but may model the behavior by becoming physically aggressive with others. In a study by Bandura, Ross, and Ross (1963), children watched film of models behaving in a physically and verbally aggressive manner toward plastic figures. Investigation showed that after viewing this film, the children learned new ways of aggressing and also exhibited reduced inhibitions against performing aggressive acts they had previously learned but never exhibited before. There is also evidence that filmed violence, particularly in realistic forms, is emotionally arousing to young children, and can result in greater retention of aggressive rather than nonaggressive content (Osborn & Endsley, 1971). Vastag (2004) relates that there is mixed research on correlation between video games and aggression, but that the highest correlation in causing children to become aggressive comes not from watching games, but from parental involvement or lack thereof in a child’s life.

Reinforced Behavior

A second origin of aggression related by Bandura (1973) is learning through practice. Behavior is shaped by its consequences, so when children’s acts of aggression are well received, aggression increases. When models are punished for their aggressive actions, aggressive acts decrease. The people with whom a child regularly associates delimit the types of behavior repeatedly observed and hence learned most thoroughly. When a child is urged by his father to “stick up for himself” or not be a “sissy,” it can promote aggressive behavior. Some cultures, parenting styles, and environmental relations (gang mentality) value physical resolution of
interpersonal disagreements. Aggressiveness is a valued attribute in some environments when status is gained through fighting (Bandura, 1973).

**Personality**

Other theories consider aggression determined by the personality of a child. Research identifies certain traits that are firmly established early in the child’s life which predetermine the direction of later developments. Martin and Anderson’s (1996) research showed that if a person is high in assertiveness (dominance, independence, competitiveness) and low in responsiveness (friendliness, empathy, helpfulness), aggression results. Menna and Landy (2001) determined that high levels of aggression in preschool children correlated with failures in certain developmental areas. The areas of empathy and impulse control were weak compared to those areas in other children. They called these areas of difficulties “affect dysregulation.” They believed children with these characteristics were at high risk for developing conduct disorder. Martin and Anderson (1996) also found that temperament related significantly to behavior problems in children. Earls and Jung (1987) also documented preschool children’s personality characteristics (aggressive traits) and home environment (high in stressors) were predictors for hyperactivity and oppositional defiance disorder.

**Environment**

Another predictor of the development of aggression and violence in a child comes from the environment. Beck (1999) discusses children raised with environmental factors such as parental violence and inconsistency. He talks of a “hostile frame” that may develop when anger and aggression surface. The child’s
negative framework for seeing the world puts the child as victim and others as villain. These children may see an impersonal statement as an affront, an innocent mistake as malice. A child in this hostile frame may believe his or her own entitlements and rights override those of others. The child may feel people are talking down to or trying to control him which leads to a feeling of vulnerability. He counters this vulnerability with hostile behavior. He is described as “hypersensitive, insult-prone, rejection-prone, thin-skinned, hot-headed” (pp. 58-59). Any punishment he receives by others in authority, such as his parents or teachers reinforces his view that he is vulnerable and others are hostile to him. As a result of the interaction between his personality and his social environment, the individual may develop a cluster of antisocial concepts and behaviors. Many aggressive children come from families that use harsh physical punishment where the child sees others as hostile in an ambiguous situation. These families do not use a democratic method of resolving conflicts, and punishments may be inconsistent and unmerited. Garmezy and Rutter (1983) believe situations that may foster disturbing behavior include frequent, intense stressors; the extent to which the environment is non supportive; and lack of coping skills a child may possess. Also, low self-concept determines how much stress can be tolerated and how much support is required. Martin and Anderson (1996) found that boys were especially affected by environmental stressors such as marital discord which resulted in significantly more behavioral disabilities.

*Biological Causes*

Early research on the cause of chronic aggression focused on single domains of risk with one body of research focused on environmental factors, while another focused
on biology. One focus of biological research in neuropsychological studies indicated
cortex abnormality in the prefrontal or anterior temporal cortex which impacts
impulsive or aggressive behavior. Other researchers examined body chemistry as
males tend to be more aggressive than females with male sex hormones heightening the
probability of aggressive reactions to frustration (Berkowitz, 1993). Abnormal
chemistry found in subjects with high levels of testosterone (Olweus, 1986) or in
subjects with low levels of Phenyl-ethylamine or Serotonin (Young & Leyton, 2002;
Zametkin, Karoum, Rapoport, Brown, & Wyatt, 1985) was also attributed to
aggression. Johnson (1980) found that diseases such as Tourette’s syndrome, head
injuries, or illnesses that cause psychiatric symptoms may be medical or neurological
syndromes that are tied to aggressive behavior.

In the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (4th ed.) text
revision (American Psychiatric Association, 2000), emotional disorders are broken
into: (a) externalizing—attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, oppositional defiance
disorder, conduct disorder and pervasive developmental disorders; and (b)
internalizing—substance abuse, eating disorders, anxiety, depression, and psychosis
(Peterson & Hittie, 2003).

The most current studies show the interplay between biological and social or
environmental factors predict pathological aggression better than the impact of either
factor alone. This research also emphasizes the interplay between biological and socio-
environmental factors (Johnson, 1989; Pine & Cohen, 1999).

Students with ED may not have learned to appropriately voice an opinion, deal
with conflict, or interact with peers and people in authority. Personality factors such as
aggression and lack of empathy may have played a part in developing aggressive behavior. Students may have been influenced in their environments by modeling and reinforcement in their families. Biological causes may also contribute to aggressive and violent behaviors that lead to conflict and cause inappropriate feelings and actions in students with ED.

Social Skills Training

Interpersonal Skills

Educators often refer students with ED for special education services because they are distinguished by intense acting-out behaviors and disruptive behavior with peers and authority figures. Strategies can help students with emotional disturbance, many of whom need anger management and development of interpersonal skills. Unfortunately, affective education, of special value to ED students, is not often emphasized in public schools (Chandler & Jones, 2001). In addition, placement in a special education class may create a cycle of negative self-labeling and behavior that promotes continued social and affective dysfunction (Long, 1966). How can a teacher help a student learn social skills in a classroom when most of the students have needs in this area? Who will be modeling the behaviors being taught?

Due to the nature of the disability, special educators place great emphasis on behavioral improvement for students with ED. These students may need help understanding social constructs and developing appropriate behavior with others. Teachers can utilize a variety of strategies to help students with ED learn new behaviors to replace negative and inappropriate actions.
Bandura (1973) believes a successful counseling or social skills program would help students develop new ways of relating to others while teaching verbal and social skills to take the place of acting out behaviors. He recommends ReEd (Reeducation) which views the problem as part of an individual’s entire ecosystem and involves social skill training of the entire family. Many school districts are now offering classes that help parents learn ways to discipline and manage their child’s behavior appropriately.

Cognitive therapy (Beck, 1976, 1999; Burns, 1990) and rational emotive therapy (Ellis & Bernard, 1983) address faulty thought processes that need to be realigned so that inappropriate emotions and actions can be changed. Beck (1976, 1999) and Burns (1990) recommend the cognitive therapy approach in social skills training. They believe that people who have emotional disorders have exaggerated anger that comes from cognitive constructs that are unrealistic. If the individual is demonstrating emotional disturbance, a person’s consciousness may contain elements that are responsible for emotional upsets and blurred thinking. When an event happens, it is the thought (cognition) about the event that determines the emotional response. However, the angry student with ED may be reacting to a premise of reality distorted by erroneous assumptions made by the student. The angry student may be reacting to illusionary offenses because of his beliefs about the offense which seem plausible to himself, although others find them far-fetched.

A child needs to learn problem solving techniques that will increase self-confidence in learning to deal effectively with misconceptions. Understanding that blind spots and self-deceptions cause deceptions and lead into troubling situations
helps the child change his/her emotions by changing the
cognitive area. When accurate information is substituted for inaccurate information,
positive feedback may reinforce a desirable response rather than a maladaptive
response (Beck, 1999).

Many times, students with ED are frustrated because they are missing skills that
allow for appropriate peer interactions. Ellis and Grieger (1986) describe rational
emotive therapy which addresses the faulty thought processes described in cognitive
behavior theory. Rational emotive therapy prescribes methods for treating emotional,
behavioral and learning problems in school-age children. Treatment goals are
modifying negative and inappropriate emotions. Vernon (1989) has a program
available to teachers that provides structured curriculum in social skills training based
on rational emotive therapy. His social skills curriculum is used in schools to teach
social skills through problem solving and role playing of appropriate, real-life
situations. Students learn positive mental health concepts in this problem-based
curriculum. A stimulus event is given, there is a discussion for personalization, and
then there are activities for understanding. Students also model assertive rather than
aggressive behaviors and learn “hot,” “cold,” and “cool” responses to events that are
troubling to them. In this way, students develop their problem solving skills related to
interpersonal relationships. Problem based social skills training is also used in classes
when social and emotional health, and drug and alcohol awareness are taught.

Gaylord-Ross (1989) recommends problem solving training so that students
may develop strategies for dealing more effectively with interpersonal interactions.

Generalization techniques (Gresham & Elliot, 1993) allow the transfer of skills such as
problem-solving into real world situations. Social function increases in the inclusive classroom because students with special needs have more contacts, more cues, and more socially acceptable behaviors to model.

Another valuable component of cognitive therapy and RET is that it helps students listen more effectively to what the other person is really thinking, which may lead to empathy. Beck (1999) believes that developing empathy for the object of hostility will inhibit the aggressor from inflicting injury. The child recognizes emotions in another, and through this empathy, he may be more forgiving of events that he perceives as “offenses.” Empathy training will help the child become assertive rather than aggressive with other people. It also allows the student to feel altruistic by being a “better person.” Empathy training provides the added bonus of offering a way to develop self-regulating behaviors (Beck, 1999). Another way to teach empathy is by enlisting the help of other children through a “circle of friends.” When peers are included in training, the student with ED feels more accepted because others see his behavior as something he has problems controlling rather than his fault (Taylor, 1996). This technique provides support for students with behavioral problems.

*Intrapersonal Skills*

As important as it is to read other’s emotions through empathy, one must also be able to identify one’s own feelings. Emotional intelligence is the ability to accurately perceive and express emotion (Goleman, 1995; Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Development usually begins at an early age as children identify emotions through nonverbal cues. However, some children who are at risk in school need direct instruction because they have not learned to understand their own emotions as a
prerequisite to anger management. They also need to understand the emotions of
others so they do not misread the behavior of others. Emotional awareness can be
taught through social-emotional learning in the classroom so that students can control
their feelings rather than letting their feelings control them (Elksnin & Elksnin, 2003).
This is of benefit to students who are emotionally disturbed and tend to be impulsive
and easily frustrated. As they become aware of their emotions, they can learn to
manage feelings that lead to acts of aggression. Understanding one’s own emotions is
the key to self control and anger management (Bodine & Crawford, 1999).

According to Beck (1999), in addition to understanding emotions and
developing empathy, self-concept is also critical in changing aggressive behavior in
children. Helping the child develop a good self-concept gives the child confidence in
his own ability to cope directly with perceived threats (Beck & Emery, 1985).
According to Bandura (1977), people avoid situations they believe exceed their
capabilities, but attempt and perform capably those tasks where they believe they will
be successful. In Social Learning Theory, people are operators in their life course.
“The human mind is generative, creative, proactive, and self-reflective not just
reactive” (Bandura, 1999). People construct thoughts about future courses of action
based on the effects of previous actions or by observing behaviors and consequences in
others. People adopt standards based on positive and negative consequences they
produce for themselves. They choose actions that give them satisfaction and avoid
those that have a negative outcome.

Teachers help students set goals and develop a way to record progress towards
those goals (White, 1995). As students master a task, they expect to master similar
tasks in the future, while failure at tasks may lead students to change their expectancy. Self-efficacy is the belief that they have the skills needed to be successful. Self-satisfaction is the result of attaining a goal: this internal reward is more powerful than external rewards such as praise or grades.

A child’s self-efficacy allows him control over actions and self-regulation of thought processes. Bandura (1997) believes that school can be an agency for cultivating self-efficacy if a child did not have strong support in formative years from parents. If the school environment can give a child a sense of efficacy in schoolwork by making successful academics possible, belief in self will occur. Bandura (1997) believes providing small steps in progress for success and praising the student’s efforts also develop efficacy.

Self-determination is also important for students with ED (Field & Hoffman, 1994) as students need to feel that they have control over their lives and decisions which impact them. They tend to put their locus of control outside of themselves and blame others for the problems they have with anger. Myers & Eisenman (2005) and Masen, McGahee-Kovac, and Johnson (2004) believe the IEP process may contain many components of self-determination for students with ED. It is beneficial for students to lead their IEP meetings and conferences so that they can know their own strengths and weaknesses, set personal goals, make plans, and evaluate outcomes. When children have a chance to provide input into their educational programming, they become more self-determined (Myers & Eisenman, 2005).

Another beneficial skill for students with emotional disturbance is the ability to self-monitor social interactions (Strain et al., 1994). Self-monitoring will improve
behavior of students with special needs because those who feel responsible for their own social behavior and academic progress will improve performance in both areas (Young, West, Smith, & Morgan, 1991). The teacher needs to teach students with ED specific behaviors such as following instructions and getting the teachers’ attention. Role-playing and modeling will help students develop desired behaviors leading to a positive learning environment. Self-monitoring skills also can be generalized by the students which will help increase appropriate social interactions and work habits (Strain, Kohler, Storey, & Danke, 1994).

Because students who are emotionally disturbed have behavioral disabilities, a primary concern of educators is to help these students learn strategies that will help them be more successful in their behavior with others. The student with ED needs specific training through modeling, problem solving techniques, and strategies of cognitive therapy to develop interpersonal skills for appropriate ways of interacting with peers and adults. Students also need to strengthen intrapersonal attributes such as empathy, emotional intelligence, and self-concept. Then they have a belief system in place that minimizes hostility and allows them to make better choices in dealing with others.

Classroom Management Systems

Along with a counseling or social skills program, Bandura (1973) recommends a structured, positive classroom environment for the student with emotional disturbance. Nagel (1981) also believes that a structured environment with positive reinforcement after attaining short-term, specific goals is the best setting for the aggressive student. When a child with ED is put into a general classroom, the teacher
may fear confrontations by the student, loss of teaching time dealing with behavior, or even losing control of the entire classroom. However, many times, the least restrictive environment decrees that the student with ED remain in the general classroom for most of the day. Students spend time in the special education class only for learning specific academic or social skills or for the teacher of students with special needs to support learning objectives where the student needs individual help.

Proactive behavior management is a must when students with ED are included in the regular room as the teacher must be prepared with a discipline plan that addresses all student actions. The IEP of the student with ED must be considered when specific goals include strategies addressing the behavioral disability of the student. School personnel need to be careful to follow those IEP objectives so that the rights of students are not violated. Punishments and negative consequences in place for general education students may be inappropriate for students with ED due to the IEP and the disability of the student.

The teacher of students with special needs can help the general education teacher by co-teaching, offering physical and moral support, and acting as a resource. Prater (2003) suggests that teachers of students with emotional disturbance examine the five elements for success (CRIME):

1. **Curriculum** should be at the level where students can be successful and should meet both standards and IEP goals.
2. **Rules** need to be posted in the room and be enforced.
3. **Instruction** needs to be motivating so students pay attention and should be differential to address different academic levels and student interests.
4. Materials should be inviting and hands-on.

5. Environment should be structured with limited distractions, a warm and welcoming teacher, and the feel of being a safe spot for all students.

Staff development of general education teachers needs to address proven strategies for working with students with ED. First, general education teachers need to modify the environment for structure and academic success so that students know the boundaries and are successful with expected behavior and with academics. If students are in a structured classroom environment, students will be doing class work and following accepted class rules. Everyone then knows what is expected, and students do not get the chance to interact inappropriately with other students because of the set boundaries.

*Operant Conditioning*

There are many variations of behavior management programs that are successful with students with behavioral problems. Discipline models are frequently based on an operant conditioning paradigm developed by B. F. Skinner (1938; 1953; 1957). Operant conditioning proposes that behavior is increased by reinforcement and decreased by punishment. Reinforcers used in classrooms to increase behavior could be tangible (stickers, prizes, grades), intangible (praise or smile from the teacher) or token (where students accumulate points for a larger reward). The punishments used in classrooms include not earning the reinforcers or disciplinary action such as staying after class or receiving a detention.

B. F. Skinner was the forerunner of using rewards to increase behavior and withholding the reward to extinguish undesirable behavior. His behavior modification
paradigm believes that if a behavior has no reinforcer, it eventually becomes extinct. The teacher needs to target certain actions for the student with ED so that the discipline plan addresses behaviors to be changed. Bandura (1973) believes aggression will end if there is no reinforcement for the learned behavior, and operant conditioning would corroborate his beliefs.

Teachers of students demonstrating ED may use tangible rewards or token economy (where students accumulate points that can be used for larger rewards) to help students maintain on-task and appropriate school behavior. Level systems commonly found in programs for the student with ED are based upon this model. With a level system, as a student increases desirable behaviors, the student earns more rights and responsibilities. If his/her behavior deteriorates, he/she moves down to a lower level with less privilege.

Students with ED may come to the general education classroom with a behavior plan already in place by the teacher of students with special needs that is being used for all the students in the special education classroom. Or, the student may be following an individualized behavior contract which is another useful technique in changing behavior (Downing, 2002). Contracting is usually done on an individual basis between a student and a teacher. If a student and teacher write a contract, they talk about a problem, set goals, determine rewards and consequences. Contracting is especially helpful with students with special needs because the ED student can work on changing one specific behavior at a time.
Assertive Discipline

Lee Canter (1976) developed a discipline program for teachers to use in the general classroom. This teacher-centered system is frequently successful in governing behavior and works on a system of rewards and punishments following the principles of Skinner’s operant conditioning (Skinner, 1953). Class rules, consequences, and rewards are developed by the students and teachers and posted in the classroom. Consequences include a discipline hierarchy that is followed for misbehaviors. Canter also advocates many rewards that may be individual (such as sending positive notes home) and groups rewards such as marbles in a jar (students work together cooperatively, putting marbles in the jar for good behavior to earn a classroom reward for everyone). Kohn (1995) believes there are risks to tangible rewards as loss of a reward can be viewed as a punishment to a child which generates anger and revenge. Kohn states that many rewards may provide temporary compliance by the student but do not change their emotional or cognitive commitments to the behavior desired. Canter (1992; 2001) developed updated positive versions of assertive discipline that stressed more self-discipline and more nontangible rewards such as supportive feedback to praise appropriate behaviors.

Discipline Without Tears

Dreikurs and Cassel’s Discipline Without Tears (1972) advocates understanding the motives for misbehavior as issues related to social belonging. The use of democratic teaching and logical consequences hold children responsible for their own behavior. This is taught by modeling the teacher’s democratic style, holding class meetings, and having logical consequences for misbehavior. The teacher should guide,
motivate, and work on winning cooperation. If a good relationship exists between a child and teacher, serious disturbances rarely arise. Students who have problems managing their behavior could benefit from class meetings and/or peer interventions, which are components of this discipline style.

In summary, an effective classroom management system seeks to prevent misbehaviors by having rules and procedures in place. Every student may occasionally have a bad day. If a teacher overreacts, the incident may be blown out of proportion. Life space intervention is a way to defuse crisis situations and seek solutions. Long (1990) describes this emotional first aid as a way to drain off frustration by allowing the student to talk and ventilate feelings. Eventually, the child becomes calm and ready to resume activities so he can transition back to the classroom. The teacher uses conflict as an opportunity to be empathetic and privately help the child problem-solve until he comes up with his own plan of action (Fecser & Long, 1998). A democratic style of give-and-take in the classroom helps students learn problem-solving skills and how to communicate effectively. Teacher strategies such as proximity control when a teacher stands near students who need attention, and redirection, where a teacher changes focus of a student who is becoming angry, can de-escalate misbehavior and aggression before it becomes an issue. Students with ED may also be on personal behavior plans set in place by the teacher of students with special needs or IEP goals.

Classroom Curriculum

Glasser (1969) states in his book, Schools Without Failure, that discipline problems are an outcome of school failures. The teacher should encourage, support and help students learn by doing useful work. Curriculum should be motivating, at-
level, and the teacher should be warm and helpful. He advocates “noncoercive
discipline” where the teacher is a problem-solver helping students analyze
misbehaviors.

Kohn (1995) believes students become lifetime learners if a teacher provides
engaging curriculum, creates a caring environment at school, and allows student voice
in determining curriculum. If the students are immersed in lessons, students are not
frustrated and behavior problems are less frequent. If the class work is motivating and
structured so that all students can feel successful, it will increase feelings of efficacy
and esteem in all students.

Best Practices

Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde (1998) list “best practices” curriculum strategies
that are sound for all teachers. First, curriculum should be student–centered, which
means it is developmentally appropriate yet challenging, so the students are able to be
successful and yet are motivated to do the work. Bradley, King-Sears and Tessier-
Switlick (1997) explain ways to differentiate school work for students who are not on
grade level through modifications that allow lower-achieving students to be successful.
The work should be real-world, authentic work and have a purpose so that students can
see that learning has meaning. Gardner (1993) believes curriculum should reach
different intelligences of children so that it addresses cognitive development and allows
students expression of creativity. Methods of teaching should also promote social
interaction and cooperative learning so that students learn interpersonal skills. Dugan
and Kamps (1995) explain that cooperative learning encourages students to rely on
each other to get the job done and teaches social skills to students with ED. Learning
should also be reflective so students take the time to write in their journals or participate in curriculum based assessment so they see their progress. Fuchs and Fuchs (1994) advocate curriculum based assessment as it allows students the opportunity to show what they learn in an authentic way. Zemelman et al. (1998) also recommend holistic learning so students see that learning is in everything they do. A way to compact curriculum standards, modify for IEP goals and have engaging curriculum is through interdisciplinary instruction where students learn skills in all academic areas through a framework of one general topic (Jenkins, 2005).

*The Constructivist Classroom*

Brooks and Brooks (1993) believe it is important to get the points of view of students in classroom activities. The teacher’s role should be one of both talking and listening with the goal of encouraging students to think and express their own thoughts. Using higher level thinking to frame tasks using terminology such as “classify” and “create” allows students to set the course for the lessons. The teachers in this type of classroom encourage students to engage in dialogue and questions for discussion. As students are given more voice in the classroom, they construct meaning about education (Lambert et al., 1995). The reciprocal processes allow students and teachers to find a common purpose in schooling.

A study by Kitchin (2004) found students were able to offer meaningful insight into their experiences when talking about teaching and learning. Students preferred the constructivist approach in the classroom because they felt they maximized their own learning when they were given a voice. They became active builders of understanding, having greater ownership of their own learning. (Kitchin, 2004).
Curriculum and IEPs

Differentiated instruction is important in the inclusive classroom (Bradley et al., 1997). Accommodations may be made, such as allowing students to take the test in the hallway or in the special education classroom with the teacher of students with special needs. Modifications may also be made such as limiting the amount of material to be studied or doing parallel instruction which means students may cover material using a different method. Students in special education classes may need remedial work because they have not mastered the skills, and they may not be able to work with the rest of the class. Teachers need to be sensitive to frustrations that may cause a child with ED to demonstrate aggression.

Social skills may be taught in the general classroom with more specific practice and reinforcement done with the teacher of students with special needs or guidance counselor. Curriculum should include strategies for behavior management or better yet, teaching the student to self-manage his behavior. Many times the IEP is the guide to what differentiation needs to occur for these students with special needs. The functional behavior assessment is a guide for the IEP team to develop a behavior intervention plan. This plan outlines strategies and supports to address any behavior exhibited by children with special needs that interferes with interpersonal relations or impedes learning (Fitzsimmons, 1998).

Classroom Teacher

Glasser (1969) states in his book, *Schools Without Failure*, that discipline problems are an outcome of school failures which could be minimized with interesting curriculum and caring teachers. He believes teachers should befriend students and help
them learn to problem solve to make better choices in behavior. When a teacher nurtures students, an environment of hope is created in the classroom which leads to student success in school.

Teaching is a client-centered interaction, and the teacher personality is the critical factor. Qualities a teacher needs to possess include a caring and concerned nature as opposed to being aloof and book-centered. Teachers need to be organized rather than careless and haphazard. They also need to be enthusiastic about the curriculum rather than dull and boring (White, 1995). Teachers should de-emphasize grades and teach improvement as the highest valued goal of the classroom.

The teacher’s attitude may determine how the student with ED is accepted in the classroom. Teachers can have positive interactions with students by preventing and defusing troublesome situations. Punishment and coercion have a negative effect because they allow the students to blame the teacher and not take ownership of misbehavior. If a teacher shows concern and caring, gives choices and provides work that is motivating and appealing to students, the teacher will be effective with the majority of students. “Students respond to us because we care—and because they like us” (Mendes, 2003, p. 56). Caring can be shown when teachers use “I care” signals such as listening, valuing every student response and using names of students. Covey (1989) believes that the key to developing positive relationships with students is to see their needs and beliefs as they are to uncover strategies to motivate them.

When a teacher makes an effort to establish rapport, dramatic changes in behavior, effort, and performance may be seen in the student. Mendes (2003) believes that a teacher can form a caring relationship with any student with whom they
consciously make an effort to develop a rapport. Teachers can maintain both
friendship-like qualities and a leadership role when acting in this professional adult
capacity.

Gootman (1997) believes caring teachers succeed in managing classroom
discipline by using problem-solving and setting expectations for limits and rewards.
Lewis, Schnapps, and Watson (1996) believe caring classrooms are characterized by
warm, supportive, stable, relationships conducive to learning. Children become
enthusiastic, lifetime learners as a result of engaging curriculum and a safe, caring
environment in which to discover and create (Kohn, 1995). This leads to
internalization of positive behaviors where students take responsibility for their own
behavior.

Relationship-Driven Teaching

If the teacher has established a relationship that is warm, caring, and non-
confrontational with the student with emotional disturbance, this relationship will help
change the stereotyped conception of authority figures (Rogers & Renard, 1999). The
teacher should be directive, and in confrontations be firm, non-emotional and describe
the behavior rather than label the behavior.

Rogers and Renard (1999) coined the term “relationship-driven teaching”
which they believe is a “joyous” way to help students succeed. When our
psychological needs are met, we want to perform to the best of our ability in order to
experience positive feelings. Positive feelings motivate because they create a learning
context that enables students to value activities that help them learn and achieve.
Learning occurs when meaningful work is presented to students, and they decide to
actively engage in the learning experience. Learning also occurs when teachers treat students as people who are valued personally, as well as educationally. When teachers and students collaborate for high-quality learning, fun and interesting learning opportunities happen.

Use of the relationship-driven teaching model enhances intrinsic motivation in classrooms. The teacher needs to manage the learning context so it captures the interest of learners. Students are drawn into learning and make work relevant by drawing on their experiences and interests. Less time is spent controlling students because the work promotes positive self-monitoring behavior in students. Alderman (2004) realizes the role teachers play in motivating students. By engaging students and developing their self-concepts, the teacher plays a critical role in creating a supportive classroom climate. A student then feels a sense of belonging, self-respect, and acceptance that sets the stage for learning.

Six standards build a relationship-centered teaching model and provide a motivating learning climate (Rogers & Renard, 1999). First, the students must feel safe from both physical danger and social embarrassment. Maslow’s (1970) hierarchy of needs demonstrates the importance of fulfilling basic needs (physiological, safety, belonging and esteem) before self-actualization can occur. In this final stage, students can focus on knowledge and understanding. When the psychological needs of students are met, they believe that taking learning risks is acceptable and are motivated to perform to the best of their abilities.

Second, work has to be valuable for students to engage completely. Students should have input in planning activities that meet curriculum standards. Students could
brainstorm ways to make learning fun with real-world application of skills. They should be encouraged to share their efforts with an audience.

Third, students need to see evidence of their progress towards mastery of academic goals. They should be charting their own progress through activities such as learning logs or portfolios. If students are challenged, yet can meet academic goals, self-efficacy is the result. Students are also more willing to work at mastering a concept through reteaching when they chart their successes.

The fourth standard is involvement. Students will want to contribute and participate if they plan the activities or work on the development of the rubrics. Then students take ownership of their work because they feel they have rights and responsibilities along with the teacher.

The fifth standard stresses caring and the nurturing relationship that develops between students and educators. “In a caring classroom, relationships based on shared respect, trust and high expectations are nurtured among every person in the classroom” (Rogers & Renard, 1999, p. 37). Thus, students respond positively to being liked and accepted by other students and the teacher. When the basic need for love and belonging is met, students want to be a part of the group rather than being on the outside.

The final standard is enabling. Educators who enable constantly seek out best teaching practices for their students. They provide a tight alignment between curriculum, instruction and assessment. They are not afraid to use new, sound teaching practices. Rogers and Renard (1999) believe that these six standards interact simultaneously to promote intrinsic motivation to learners in the classroom.
Empathy

Good (2002) writes about teachers who scorn their students. “It is the invisible wounds—the wounds to our souls and egos—that take the longest time to heal” (Good, 2002, p. 45). He talks of teachers who bullied students in class. What these teachers lacked was empathy, the ability to feel with and for others. Does empathy by the teacher reach students who may otherwise tune out in a classroom? Do personalities of teachers and relationships formed with students have the power to determine student learning in the classroom setting? Hutchinson (2003) talks of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs as it relates to relationship-driven teaching. Physiological needs (physical factors such as room temperature, breaks for restroom, etc.) are the first foundations required in the classroom. The next layer for motivating learning includes safety. A teacher should aim for a classroom atmosphere of respect where concerns are voiced and students are able to stretch their limits with safe experimenting. Teachers need to endorse the learners’ interests as triggers to learning. Mutual trust develops with constructive feedback and respect for the learner. If a student feels respected in the classroom, the learner becomes motivated through inclusion. Self esteem is another step in the hierarchy which is shown through praise, words of appreciation, and constructive rather than destructive criticism. If a teacher pays attention to these factors then self actualization is realized. The learner can then flourish in this ideal environment which is conducive to a “deep” learning approach (Hutchinson, 2003).

Burns (1990) believes that empathy and expression of feelings are the secrets of effective communication. Being empathetic rather than confrontive with misbehaviors will deescalate emotionally-charged situations. The communication and positive regard
between the teacher and student will allow the teacher to gain control of a threatening situation. Twisted thinking on the teacher’s part would instead lead to a direct confrontation with the misbehaving student.

*Emotional Intelligence*

If a student is having a bad day, how do we respond? The brain possesses an emotional trigger that gets activated more frequently in an adolescent than an adult brain. Although this does not excuse student performance and behavior, it may help teachers feel more empathy and determine what course of action is best to help the student (Mendes, 2003). The better skilled a teacher is in emotional intelligence, the more likely to understand students’ needs. This will help form strong bonds with students that will help manage stress for students as well as the teacher. It also allows better time management to reach teaching goals (Reissman, 1999).

Emotional intelligence can be divided into five different categories. The first is self-awareness which helps teachers recognize a feeling as it happens. The students will benefit from the teacher’s pleasure in learning when the teacher keeps positive emotions flowing by sharing personal interests. The second category is keeping emotions in check. Part of the job is to be prepared to handle whatever comes up. Student disruptions may not be directed at the teacher but show a reflection of what is happening in the student’s personal life. An emotional outburst on the teacher’s part won’t help the situation. The third category is exercising empathy. Look at the situation from the student’s perspective to gain an understanding that will help in handling situations constructively. The fourth category involves being motivated and setting goals in teaching. List steps that will help to reach these goals and experience
the satisfaction of achievement. The last category is using social skills to manage relationships. Educators should socialize with students to get to know them as people and nurture their social and emotional development (Reissman, 1999).

Good teachers have emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995) so that “ten forms of twisted thinking” (Burns, 1990) do not surface. This twisted thinking would result in a teacher escalating misbehavior in a student with ED because the teacher’s belief system would be faulty. Likewise, a student with ED might have a faulty belief about events, leading to over-emotionalism and over-reactions. If a teacher feels challenged, or that a student should “not get away with” behaviors, the teacher may react in a threatening way which will escalate the interaction. The teacher may magnify a negative comment or jump to conclusions that have the potential to make a mild misbehavior into an explosive situation.

According to Goleman (1995), a teacher who has emotional intelligence would deal with a person who is physically or verbally aggressive, condescending, or using sarcastic tones by “changing the focus.” Teachers should acknowledge student feelings by empathizing and allowing students to express feelings. Another component of deactivating the negative behavior when it is triggered is a cooling off period or distraction that gives the aggressor time to rethink his response.

*Bidding*

Relationship doors open during “bidding” (Gottman & DeClaire, 2001) when people attempt to connect with others. If a bid results in a positive response in the “emotional bank,” that can be saved to absorb a later relationship difficulty. Every response between two people is either a withdrawal or deposit in the relationship
account. These verbal and nonverbal bids may be a glance, a touch, or direct conversation that opens the relationship door. Teachers have the choice to determine which type of transaction will occur, because even when a teacher corrects a behavior, it can be made into a bid. “What’s going on?” can be a positive response to a problem which builds communication and strengthens relationships. Steps to building relationships include using students’ names and ideas in presentations, asking students to share their interests, and welcoming their input into the curriculum. “Know your students’ world and go there first to open the relationship door” (Mendes, 2003, p. 60). Teachers also need to share themselves through appropriate self-disclosure so they become real to their students.

Praise

As noted earlier, reinforcement in programs for students with ED often relies on tangible reinforcers. Praise is also considered a reinforcer; however it would be considered an intangible reinforcer. Sutherland (2000) charted positive and negative interactions between students with ED and general education teachers. He found that teachers of these students had negative interactions four times as often as positive interactions with students with ED. He also studied the effect of teacher praise on students with emotional and behavioral disorders and found that both academics and behavior benefited significantly with positive reinforcement by teachers. Because the ways individuals treat each other is determined by reciprocal action, it is important that frequency of positive interactions increase, which can be done by using praise. He recommends methods to increase teacher praise such as peer coaching and videotaping for self-evaluation.
Humor

Sanchez (1998) believes there are advantages to using humor in the classroom. He believes humor keeps pupils “alive” and waiting to see what comes next. Laughter links pupils to the teacher through enjoyment. Barth (1990) pronounced the endorphin released into the bloodstream during laughter consists of the same chemical produced in the brain to relieve pain. Forbes (1997) believes that humor can be used to reduce anger and aggression, as it relieves stress and helps provide a coping mechanism.

In summary, the impact that a teacher can have on a student may be positive or negative. Teachers need to show they care about each individual by using relationship development, empathy, emotional intelligence, positive bidding, praise, and humor. Attitudes, academic achievement, and even psychological outcomes can be a result of these interactions.

I’ve come to the frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It’s my personal approach that creates the climate. It’s my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a student’s life miserable or joyful. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal. In all my situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a student humanized or de-humanized (Ginott, 2001, p. 5).

Inclusion

Over the last decade, parents, professionals and policymakers have raised concerns about separating and segregating students with special needs from the mainstream into self-contained special education classrooms (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994). P.L. 94-142, later reauthorized as IDEA, and most recently P.L. 105-17 have mandated that students with special needs should receive educational services in the least restrictive environment. Litigation such as Brown v. Board of Education (1954) and
Mills v. Board of Education of District of Columbia (1972) moved students with special needs into general education classes as the least restrictive environment.

An important foundation for inclusion includes a shared vision between parents, general educators, special educators, administration, and the student. However, support is needed for the general educators, many of whom have had inadequate training to address unique needs of special students (Wolery et al., 1994). Quality placement for these students includes a supportive teacher, regular and extensive review of material, direct instruction, a positive climate, and requirements that students remain on task (Kluwin & Moores, 1989).

Inclusion According to Administrators, Teachers, and Parents

Because building administrators and teachers are responsible for implementing inclusion in schools, it is imperative that they are recognized as the ones responsible for making change happen (Beirne-Smith & Latham, 2000). According to Bang (1993), when inclusion was first implemented, general education teachers did not feel they had the skills or support necessary to teach students with disabilities. Collaboration between the general and teachers of students with special needs became a necessary component of successful inclusion (Beirne-Smith, 2000). A study by D’Alonzo and Giordano in 1997 indicated that 81% of general education teachers believe inclusion is not educationally sound. They expressed concern about teacher stress and increased difficulties with classroom management, as well as the quality of education for other students being impaired.

Research with parents indicates that some parents view inclusion as facilitative of increased self confidence, more opportunities for positive peer interactions, and
higher academic expectations. Parents also view inclusion as an opportunity to eliminate poor self-esteem resulting from resource room placement. However, some studies have reported positive attitudes toward segregated special education because of the perception of teacher caring and attention (Jones, Thorn, Chow, Thompson & Wilde, 2002).

Inclusion for Students with Emotional Disturbance

Students with emotional disturbance and behavior disorders are the “third largest category of students with disabilities” (Bateman, 1996). Long (1966) believes that self-contained placement of a student with ED into a special education class may create a cycle of negative self-labeling and behavior that promotes continued social and affective dysfunction. Researchers found that students with behavioral disorders may be excluded from regular classrooms due to their need for structure, as well as the teacher’s fear of disrupted instruction in regular classrooms (Kastsiyannis, 1993). Teachers and inclusive practices may be “the bridge that connects a school with the students who often feel like strangers there” (Gallagher, 2002, p. 57).

Drisko (1993) describes a study using social work consultation with teachers of students with special needs as a way to increase teacher’s empathy for, and understanding of, the student. The social workers helped teachers understand because of the students’ varied backgrounds, student expectations may be different from what the teacher intends. The student may not expect caring or supportive help from adults. When a student puts his head down and becomes withdrawn and/or oppositional, he may be frustrated, and without teacher intervention, may suddenly become aggressive by throwing desks or fighting with peers. The success of this model was in broadening
the teachers’ perspectives of students. Teachers decreased the tendency to personalize aggressive behavior. They also saw students as individuals with styles that may present differently than the underlying emotion felt. In this model, teachers learned to define student skills while increasing the understanding of individual students.

Students with emotional and behavioral problems have higher dropout rates and less success in work placements than the general population because they have not successfully learned to work with peers and follow rules (Gallagher, 2002; Wood & Cronin, 1999). However, in an inclusive setting, students with ED have the chance to interact with peers who model appropriate behaviors. Thus, social modeling is possible with access to students in general education classes who are not handicapped by behavior and emotional problems. Inclusion will help these students in their futures as citizens and also help general education students learn to deal with others who have emotional disturbance.

In studies where general education teachers have students with disruptive behaviors, if the student has a label of emotional disturbance, teachers were more likely to respond negatively to the disruptive behaviors of the students with ED than to those general education students with the same behaviors (Nelson & Roberts, 2000). Teachers were more likely to use a command in response to the disruptive behaviors of general education students than in the case of students with ED where teachers were more likely to use a reprimand. It was also noted that the students with ED would rarely comply with the teacher’s attempt to correct disruptive behavior. This led to a chain of interactions where the student with ED interacted negatively with the teacher by arguing, being defiant, or showing aggression while general education students
generally complied with the teacher’s first command. Also, when a teacher responded to disruptive behavior by taking points away in a behavior modification program, it escalated the situation due to the ongoing reciprocal nature of teacher-student interactions (Nelson, 1996; Nelson, Martella, & Garland, 1998).

Increasing teacher praise was found to decrease aversive behaviors of the students (Gunter, Jack, Shores, Carrell, & Flowers, 1993). Classroom management such as a token system with tokens given for following the rules rather than taken away for rule infractions is recommended. Teacher attention is a powerful positive reinforcer and should not be used as negative attention to correct inappropriate student behavior (Sprick, 1981).

In a study by Kirby and Shields (1972), on-task behavior was shown to increase from 51% to 97% when teacher praise was consistently used. Also, academic outcomes rose dramatically when teachers used praise for oral reading and math problems. One way to increase frequency of positive interactions between teachers and students is to increase the rate of teacher praise because individuals treat each other based on reciprocal action.

*Inclusion According to Students with Emotional Disturbance*

Crowley (1991) studied aggressive adolescents to find out teacher interventions they perceived as most effective in helping them to develop their academic and social skills in mainstreamed (inclusive) classes. During interviews, the participants cited flexible academic expectations, flexible behavioral expectations, personal interaction between students and teachers, and humor as ways mainstream classroom teachers help them. On the other hand, they identified strict academic expectations, rigid behavioral
expectations, and disciplinary procedures as ways mainstream classroom teachers interfere with the learning process.

In a study in Finland by Jahnukainen (2000), students in special education classes for emotional and behavioral disorders were interviewed 10 years after graduation. Results showed these young adults felt the most positive elements of their special education program included the personality and competence of the teachers of students with special needs, improved school achievement, fair discipline, and the joy of learning. A study by Vaughn and Klinger (1998) summarized six research studies of students’ perceptions about inclusion and resource rooms. Results revealed that most students with special needs preferred specialized instruction in the resource room for part of the day because the work was easier, more fun, and they were given more teacher help; however, they liked the inclusion classroom because it facilitated making friends. Negative experiences in special education included the experience of being labeled and the unchallenging instructional level.

Lan and Lanthier (2003) state that high-risk students become alienated from schools. They become disinterested and disengaged in the values, norms, and activities of the school community as they move through their school careers. They may need more school support from a caring teacher to help them avoid dropping out. Garlick (1990) and Greco (1993) interviewed students with ED to find their perceptions of the ideal teacher. Both research studies found that the top four descriptors students used about teachers were “nice, friendly, patient, and caring.”

In conclusion, students with ED need to be included in the general education classroom for social and academic reasons. They need the exposure to students who do
not have social problems so they can model acceptable behavior. The academics are more challenging, and as long as the student with ED is not frustrated, he gains the opportunity to develop to his greatest intellectual capacity in the general classroom.

Students depend on the teacher to structure the environment and determine level-appropriate work. Teachers, administrators, parents, and students have strong ideas about appropriate teacher attributes and classroom expectations that allow the student with ED to find success in the inclusion classroom.

Student Voice

Why seek out and listen to student voices? What kind of contributions can they make for school reform? Voice is important since students who perform poorly in school tend to be silent or even pushed out of the system totally (Maguire, 2000). At-risk students fail to establish strong bonds with teachers and peers. It is difficult for disruptive and disengaged students to develop trusting relationships if they bring histories of abuse and violence that result in distrust (McGrath, 1998). A goal is to draw them into a more active role in the community of learners, to deepen their bonds to school (Kroeger et al., 2004). Silent participants can be heard through the empowering process of voice.

By critically examining what students say, educators break apart some of the barriers that hold students back from making positive connections. It gives teachers a place to start when an at-risk student is not responding to traditional educational procedures. The teacher can then establish a connection that shows the teacher is interested in the individual student, not just scores in a grade book. If even one adult believes in a student and gains the child’s trust, this might be enough of a supportive
relationship to reverse the potential to drop out of school (Katz, 1997). If even one adult in a child’s life communicates good intentions, the child gains confidence from the encouragement (Zimrin, 1986).

Bronfenbrenner (1999) believes that there is a dynamic relationship between each individual and the larger context of the environment. Thus, listening to student voices will help change the environment in which the individual functions, which can lead to changes in an individual’s behavior. When student voice is nurtured, it disrupts students’ expectations for oppression experienced in previous educational settings. The environment that gives opportunities to speak and succeed permits students to connect on a personal level with teachers. The authoritative power expected in the role of the teacher is distributed and shared with the students, encouraging student ownership (Ennis & McCauley, 2002).

According to Hapner and Imel (2002), allowing students a voice develops strengths in many areas. Researchers, administrators, teachers, and teacher educators speak very clearly about the benefits of teaching aspects of self-determination to students with disabilities. Students develop skill in self-observation, self-evaluation, and self-reinforcement as they discuss their lives. Students learn self-advocacy through recognizing and asking for what they need to be successful. The end result is an increase in student involvement in education. Research indicates that student progress is related to student perceived choices because students value making their own decisions and feeling that their efforts are effective (Taylor, Adelman, Nelson, Smith, & Phares, 1989), leading to an internal locus of control. As they feel a
partnership with the teachers and school personnel, students realize they are, after all, the primary stakeholders in education (Lincoln, 1995).

Summary

Students with emotional or behavioral disturbances have historically had high drop-out rates from school. Students in special education classes received more adult attention and adapted curriculum which led to increased academic success. However, placement in a special education classroom was stigmatizing to the child which perpetuated social dysfunction (Kelly & Norwich, 2004; Long, 1966). Learning appropriate social behaviors and acceptance by peers were needs that were best met in inclusive classrooms. Also, academic achievement increased in the general education classroom.

Students with emotional disturbance present a variety of challenging behaviors that inhibit learning. Among these behaviors are verbal and physical aggression. These behaviors frequently result in rejection by peers. Also, general education teachers may resist inclusion of acting out and aggressive students because these behaviors may interfere with academic achievement of others in the classroom.

A number of theories offer explanations on the etiology of aggressive behavior. Among these theories are Bandura’s Social Learning Theory, Beck’s Cognitive Behavior Model, and Skinner’s Theory of Operant Conditioning. These theories have also resulted in intervention strategies based on their paradigms. Classroom management models employ these theories and are utilized with students in both regular and special education programs. The functional behavior assessment leads to development of a behavior intervention plan so necessary skills are identified which
will enable the student learns to behave in a more appropriate manner. Social skills are taught to promote prosocial behavior so the student with ED is more accepted by peers and adults. Helping the child develop good work habits and curriculum adaptations in the inclusive setting promote behavioral improvement. Also essential for student success are teacher characteristics including empathy, warmth, praise, and humor.

A great many variables impact student success, and special education research has examined these variables in relative depth. Despite these research efforts, little attention has been paid to what the student perceives as beneficial. In this study, as students reflect on their school experiences, both good and bad, this student perspective will be heard. Thus school personnel, parents and students will all have input in relating factors that maximize success in inclusive settings for students with emotional disturbance.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Rationale of Research Design

The purpose of this study was to identify approaches that benefit students who demonstrate emotional disturbance when they are included in the general classroom regarding teacher style, classroom methods, and discipline practices. In this case study, nine high school students voiced their beliefs about issues relating to their school experiences. This chapter details the research design and methods of data collection and analysis used to conduct this project.

Design of the Study

We are given access to the human voice in qualitative research which seeks a deeper truth through in-depth, open-ended questioning. The researcher gets a holistic perspective that shows an individual’s perceptions, beliefs, and experiences in life. The researcher listens to others’ stories and interprets and retells their accounts (Glesne, 1999). Special educators honor individualization in teaching which is best studied through a qualitative method because it allows an in-depth portrayal of human endeavors, interactions and situations (Crowley, 1994, 1995).

Although we can never truly know the world of our subjects, we can try to know as much as possible through qualitative inquiry. The field researcher enters the
world of the participants through the field site, and after observation, interviews
participants to find common perceptions. The researcher records a thick description:
writing, observing and interpreting from a variety of sources. Through sources such as
participant observation, one-on-one interviews with members of the group, and
document review, the researcher can build theories composed of identifying variables
(or themes) that are interrelated (Yin, 1989).

Smith (1979) states:

“Case studies are differentiated from other types of qualitative research in
that they are intensive descriptions and analysis of a single unit or bounded
system such as an individual, program, event, group, intervention, or
community. Perhaps the major point about case studies to keep in mind is
that they are richly descriptive in order to afford the reader the vicarious
experience of having been there. The case study should take the reader into
the case situation, a person’s life, a group’s life, or a program’s life” (Patton,

A key strength of the case study method involves using multiple sources and
techniques in the data gathering process that strengthens the study by providing
opportunities for triangulation. The data is sorted in different ways, cross-checked, and
examined for discrepancies and patterns. Then the data is transformed so that it can be
understood by the reader (Yin, 1984). As the researcher gives importance, order, and
form to the study through the essence of case study design, interpretation occurs
(Peshkin, 2000). Gall et al. (2003) believe the researcher draws conclusions in part
through the use of intuition and personal judgment to form this interpretation.

This study attempts to provide students with emotional disturbance a voice in
describing their school experiences through the use of the qualitative method. It opens
a window into beliefs that might otherwise be unknown in identifying those variables
that students believe impact their success in the school setting in favorable and unfavorable ways. The study adds to the scholarly knowledge base to provide a link between students and educators with the potential of helping teachers understand and better serve students who are emotionally disturbed.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study regarding educational programming to be investigated:

1. According to students who are identified as having emotional disturbance, what components of a teacher’s teaching style are considered positive and/or negative strategies in working with students with severe emotional disturbance?

2. According to students with ED, how can the classroom environment be structured to best help the student learn?

3. According to the student with ED, what specific discipline/classroom management practices aid in keeping the student focused on learning?

Researcher Subjectivity

I am the researcher in this study, a teacher with over 20 years of experience in teaching at the elementary level. My focus has been experiences in working with students of special needs, especially those students who have emotional disturbance. Classroom experiences include 13 years as a special education teacher, and another 10 years as a general classroom teacher who practiced inclusion with students having disabilities, specifically those labeled as emotionally disturbed. Thus, subjectivities related to this research project fall in two major categories: belief in personal teaching style and the possibility of personal knowledge of the research participants.
First, I am experienced teaching students with ED, both in a special education setting and in a general education classroom. I know general education teachers who become apprehensive when students with ED are included in their classrooms, making comments such as, “I’m not going to let him get away with anything.” and “I’m going to be right in his face all the time.” This is not the approach I feel works best with these students, so that reflects bias in perception of successful student/teacher interactions. I have personal beliefs about teaching methods that provide the best educational practices for all students as well as strategies that are successful in helping students with ED when they are having difficulty controlling their behavior. This background can be advantageous in research because knowledge of the teaching profession will help in formulating better questions and skillful interpretation of data. Having this professional training allowed me to spend time gathering rich details from participants rather than spending time on superficial discussion and explanation. However, this is also recognized as a potential bias that needed to be monitored for ways it might distort objectivity.

Another source of subjectivity is the fact that I have had prior professional interactions with some of the students interviewed at the high school. This personal knowledge of some students facilitated better rapport which allowed probing in more depth during the interviews. However, as there is a connection between rapport and subjectivity, rapport needed to be moderated. Loss of objectivity and sample bias may badly distort the research if the researcher over-identifies or becomes too friendly with the participants (Gans, 1982).
“Objectivity requires the researcher to withhold his or her own biases and prejudices about the research and the people involved in it and to try to control any outside influences (including his or her own hopes about the outcomes) on the research result” (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 43). The researcher’s values though, play a role in the selection of the research question. I knew I must maintain objectivity in the outcomes of the research so passionate commitments do not become a source of bias in the interpretation of the results.

Glesne and Peshkin (1992) explore subjectivities through lenses: a personal lens relates research with relationships in the researcher’s life; a justice lens looks at advocacy for the oppressed or underprivileged; a caring lens connects the personal and justice with compassion. This research project looked through these lenses; even though they may have provided a potential for bias. Glesne (1999) believes that research flourishes when researchers adopt an ethic of advocacy on behalf of research participants.

Biases that may impact this research were monitored in several ways. First, data from comparable studies in other settings was examined to give this project an objective start. Personal notes were kept during participant observations, interviews, and document analysis. Inferences and personal observations, reflections, hunches, and emotional reactions of the field were recorded to monitor bias through a subjectivity audit (Peshkin, 1988). I took notes connected to the research that aroused strong positive or negative feelings, as these were sure signs subjectivity was at work. These areas reflected my own beliefs and background, and as I sought out subjectivity
systematically, became aware of how it might be shaping the inquiry and research outcomes.

By keeping track of subjectivity perspectives, I guarded against creating constructs from personal biases. Member checking was another way to make sure research was not being slanted in a direction of personal bias. Participants listened to my interpretations of their interview responses giving feedback to ensure coding and themes were on target. Triangulating initial impressions with other sources of data such as observation, interviews and document collection was another way of maintaining objectivity.

Subjectivity needs to be monitored through a variety of methods to establish validity, and introspection in identifying biases, journaling personal observations and emotional reactions, member checking, and triangulation will help avoid bias. However, subjectivity is the basis for the story the researcher is telling as it shapes insights through values, attitudes, beliefs, and interests. “Monitoring subjectivity is not synonymous with controlling for subjectivity….Subjectivity is something to capitalize on rather than to exorcise” (Glesne, 1999, p. 109).

Research Design

Setting

The setting for this study was a high school in a large suburban school district in the Midwest United States. Most of the high school population is of a middle socio-economic status. This school has two special education classes intended for students with emotional disturbance, and although some of these students are included in general education courses for core academic subjects, most are included in general education
classes for elective subjects such as health, gym, shop, and art. The teachers of students with special needs explain that the core academics in general education classrooms generally are too frustrating for students with ED because the work-load is heavy and academic expectations are rigorous. This school system also houses an alternative program outside of the high school building for students with ED whose problems are too severe to participate in the high school with the general high school population. These students are not included in any general education classes during the school day and were not included in this study.

Population

Students participating in this research proposal were required to meet certain criteria. The population included students identified as having emotional disturbance (which means they will have an IEP for ED). Also, in order to be included in this study, students had to demonstrate aggressive behavior that was documented as occurring at school within the last year, must have participated in inclusion in at least one general education classroom for at least one year, and be between the ages of 14-19 years old.

Access

The researcher received permission to conduct the study from the University of Akron’s Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects. IRB also approved an informative letter and consent form for parents, and an informative letter and assent form for student participants. Gatekeepers who allow access were helpful in locating key informants and individuals to provide useful insights into the group (Creswell, 1998). The researcher met with the Pupil Personnel Director (who obtained
permission from the superintendent of the school district), and later with the five high school administrators to explain the research project and gain consent.

Participants

The principals suggested a meeting with the two teachers of students with special needs to explain the proposal and the type of student population needed for the project. After the teachers met with the researcher and understood the project, they prepared a list of 10 students they felt fit the participant qualifications. They also recommended that the students would be more likely to participate if the program was explained to them by the researcher before the permission letter went home to the parents.

Glesne (1999) relates that convenience sampling is most often used in qualitative work. As the available population is a small number because this is a low-incidence population, it was anticipated that all students who fit the criteria and consented to be in the study would be included.

Data Collection Methods

Participation

The researcher visited the special education classrooms where the teachers of students with special needs introduced the researcher to the students. The research project was explained as the researcher asking questions to determine what students believe is a good teacher and a good classroom. Students learned the first step in the project would be an observation in an inclusion class, and then students would be interviewed about their experiences in that class and other inclusion classes. Interview questions would ask what they liked or disliked in teachers, what kinds of classroom
activities they enjoyed, what rules they felt were fair, etc. (See Appendix G for copies of interview questions and topics of interest.) Students were told that their participation was totally voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. They also learned that all interviews would be confidential, pseudonyms would be used for student participants and teachers so that individuals cannot be identified, the school district would be anonymous, and the only people with access to the research would be University of Akron faculty. Student interest was generated, and all the participants seemed interested in being interviewed to “tell their stories.” The researcher then double-checked to make sure that each selected participant fit the criteria, and checked the semester schedules. One student who qualified had to be dropped from the research project because of time constraints, as the researcher could only interview students during periods 1-5 at the high school because during periods 6-8 the researcher was at her job. Thus, nine students were determined to fit the criteria necessary to participate in the research project.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Names of Participants (Pseudonyms)</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Grade in School</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Inclusion Class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ali</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeremy</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominick</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ricky</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Health</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(table continues)*
Participants were told that they could only participate in the study after parents returned signed consent forms to the school. The researcher then mailed consent letters to the nine parents. The parent consent letters were slow to return to school, but as the researcher met with students who had parental consent, it was a reminder to the others to return their signed parent letters. Also, telephone calls to parents as a reminder to return the forms resulted in written consent from all parents contacted (see Appendix C). One parent did ask to meet personally with the researcher before signing. His concern was that strict confidentiality would be upheld and was reassured in his meeting. He also asked to read the paper when it was completed, and he was given directions for reading it on-line and the approximate date it would be available to be read.

One special education teacher offered to send an email to the nine inclusion teachers whose classes were to be observed to explain the research project. The inclusion teachers were told they would be notified a few days before the classroom observation of specific times and dates the researcher would be in to visit.

The high school day is divided into 50-minute periods for classes. One participant observation was made for each student in an inclusion class, and up to five interviews were held over a 6-month period in one school year. Most observations and interviews were done during first through fifth periods due to the researcher’s time
commitments for employment. A variety of interview techniques was used, including semi-structured questioning, which involved getting students to talk about their experiences and perceptions by asking open-ended questions, and free list and pile sorting which asked students to make lists of teacher characteristics, teaching methods and discipline strategies.

Pre-Observation Trust Building During Interview #1

The success of qualitative research with this population may depend on motivating the students to share experiences and perceptions, so an important purpose of this pre-observation interview was building rapport. The participants were told that they were chosen by their teachers to participate in this study in an effort to learn their opinions about what teachers can do to make school a better experience for students with ED. Students realized they would be provided “voice” in sharing their perceptions and suggestions, and understood that their teachers valued their opinions and that is why they were selected.

During this first meeting, students and the researcher reviewed management of confidentiality including student identification in the study through a pseudonym. Participants again were informed of their option to leave the study at any time and their right to not participate in any portion of the interview if they were uncomfortable. They gave permission for the interviews to be taped with the understanding that tapes would be destroyed after transcription. Students were told they would be interviewed three to five times during the semester and that the researcher would bring a “goodie bag” every time filled with small food treats to compensate them for their time. The participants were also asked to help identify an inclusion class for participant
observation and told that if they saved data from that class (ie: graded tests, class syllabus, study sheets, homework, etc.) they could put it in a file in a classroom, and the researcher would give them a bonus treat for each paper stored there. Students then were given a written assent form which all nine students signed as an agreement to participate in the study (see Appendix B).

Observation

Inclusion teachers were notified by high school personnel that a researcher would be observing one class period. The researcher then emailed the inclusion teacher a few days before the classroom visit (see Appendix E). The visit at this fieldwork site lasted for 50 minutes, one school period, where the researcher made observational field notes during the class. Within 24 hours after the observation, descriptive field notes were transcribed which gave a detailed and objective account of everything observed. Analytic comments were also recorded which denoted questions that arose. These questions helped the researcher explore what was going on in the classroom that was similar or different from what was expected related to the literature review. Personal notes were taken as subjective reactions to the observations. These reflections allowed an interpretation of what was seen and heard by the researcher. Both the analytic comments and personal notes were done soon after the observation to supplement the descriptive field notes with additional insights. The researcher was able to remain a non-participant observer in the classroom which facilitated note-taking. The data from the observation helped in the development of questions for semi-structured interviews based on interactions and activities observed in the classroom.
Interviews

The participant observation before the second interview helped in designing interview questions and aided by providing multiple data collection tools for triangulation which increased the validity of the study. For the second interview, specific questions were formed based on each individual observation in the classroom. (See the Interview #2 questions in Appendix G.) During the interview, students were asked about their perceptions of the school setting, teacher methods and discipline practices in the inclusion classes that were observed. Specific questions formulated from the observation in the classroom helped students start in-depth discussion about these areas.

Subsequent interviews started with member checking to make sure the researcher’s perceptions from the previous interviews did reflect the views of the participants (see Interview #3, 4 and 5 questions in Appendix G). In these interviews, open-ended questions were more general and followed a semi-structured interview format. Students were asked to tell about their worst experience and worst teacher at school, and their best teacher and best experience at school. Also, they were asked to tell what a teacher could do to make things better or worse for the student when they were having a “bad day.” Demographic information was elicited from a structured list of questions that pulled information on school history, homework policy at home, what rules they feel are important at school, who they would talk to about a problem, interests and goals in life, etc. In the final interview, the researcher and student participant reviewed the documents saved from the inclusion class and discussed these papers’ relevance to learning. Midterm grades for the class were discussed, including
reasons for the grade received. Participants were then asked to give one piece of advice to teachers that would help them be successful in working with them or with any students in special education classes.

Five in-depth individual interviews were held over 6 months to explore research questions using qualitative investigative techniques. The interviews included structured interview questions as well as semi-structured interview questions with open-ended responses. Student responses were tape recorded and transcribed within a few days. The emergent design of questioning was flexible and changed to reflect particular conversation topics of the volunteer participant. The interview questions served as a guide rather than a formal, orally administered survey.

Free List and Pile Sort

In another technique used in these interviews, each subject was asked to give a list of:

1. What a good teacher has or is………..

2. What things a good teacher does, like methods of instruction……

3. How would you structure the day so students could best learn and be focused on lessons………..

As the participant listed characteristics, the researcher wrote each on individual index cards using the technique of free listing. After polling all nine students, these three separate topics yielded 20-25 cards for each category. During the next interview, using the technique of pile sorting, the participants grouped the cards by sorting into three separate piles: Most important, kind of important, not so important. Cards were ranked through this pile sorting technique, so that the 20-30 characteristics were put in
order of importance. This technique facilitated discussion concerning the research questions and also helped in coding information obtained during interviews and participant observations.

According to Schensul, LeCompte, Nastasi, and Borgatti (1999), cultural domains comprise a list of people’s perceptions that are shared across individuals. They give empirical information that tells what is shared, and to what extent it is shared. Elicitation techniques for cultural domain differ from the open-ended questions used to elicit information about individual informants because cultural domains are elicited across individuals through techniques such as free listing and pile sorting (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999).

Document Collection

Both participants and inclusion teachers were encouraged to save course documents for the researcher. Students were asked to save activities or assignments they liked (or disliked), tests with teacher comments, a syllabus the teacher had written for the class, hand-outs for things like class discipline or grading procedures. These were potentially useful documents because they could corroborate observations and interviews or shape new directions for this research which is important for triangulation (Glesne, 1999). The general education teachers saved documents they felt would illustrate student progress such as interim grade sheets and student work. The special education teacher provided a copy of student schedules, semester grades, and semester discipline referrals.
Table 2

Data Collection Dates during 45 Minute Class Periods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Names</th>
<th>Interview #1 Date</th>
<th>Participant Observation Date</th>
<th>Interview #2 Date</th>
<th>Interview #3 Date</th>
<th>Interview #4 Date</th>
<th>Interview #5 Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ali</td>
<td>9/22</td>
<td>9/27</td>
<td>10/6</td>
<td>11/10</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeremy</td>
<td>9/26</td>
<td>10/06</td>
<td>10/11</td>
<td>11/10</td>
<td>1/11</td>
<td>2/8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominick</td>
<td>9/25</td>
<td>10/06</td>
<td>10/11</td>
<td>11/14</td>
<td>1/11</td>
<td>1/30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ricky</td>
<td>9/30</td>
<td>10/06</td>
<td>10/17</td>
<td>11/10</td>
<td>1/11</td>
<td>1/30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick</td>
<td>10/04</td>
<td>10/06</td>
<td>10/11</td>
<td>11/14</td>
<td>1/11</td>
<td>1/30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mikey</td>
<td>10/04</td>
<td>10/11</td>
<td>10/17</td>
<td>11/14</td>
<td>1/11</td>
<td>2/8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>9/26</td>
<td>10/04</td>
<td>10/17</td>
<td>11/10</td>
<td>1/12</td>
<td>1/30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyle</td>
<td>9/26</td>
<td>10/04</td>
<td>10/17</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim</td>
<td>9/30</td>
<td>10/06</td>
<td>10/24</td>
<td>11/10</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Transferred to more restrictive placement
** Transferred to another school district

Data Analysis

The researcher must gather information about actions and interactions, reflect on their meaning, evaluate conclusions, and interpret material (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). The researcher is doing an ongoing analysis of the data that comes out of participant observations, interviews, and document collection while gathering data. This analysis leads the researcher to evaluate work and modify plans to make sure that the investigation into the culture of participants is thorough and well-detailed.
The measurement instruments analyzed in this research study include participant observation, interviews, free lists and pile sorts, and document collection. Initial data gathering and evaluation was initiated through an etic approach, which is information that is gathered through the literature review. As field work was done, the information added an emic perspective, which is the view of the participants. Coding was constantly changing to reflect the new data received by the researcher.

**Participant Observation**

As much as possible, the researcher was an observer and not a participant in the classroom. Field notes taken during participant observation included a map of the environment as well as descriptive notes about all the interactions and actions in the field setting. Analytic notes included questions or areas of concern that needed further explanation in later interviewing of participants; personal notes included subjective reactions to incidents or discussion.

Notes on the observation were reread and then coded. Coding found patterns to be explored with subjects and analytic notes led to formation of questions for interviewing. The participant observation was a way to form questions for the semi-structured interviews done with the participants because it allowed the interviewer to discuss specific, recent interactions in the classroom with the participant.

**Interviews**

For interviews, the researcher went into the interview with open-ended questions. Any patterns or inconsistencies that had been noted by the researcher in previous data collection were explored. During transcription of the interviews, patterns that showed similarities became apparent. The analysis of the data identified key
factors in the study and the relationships among them (Glesne, 1999). First coding
followed etic emerging themes which came from the literature review. As interviews
were analyzed, emic perspectives were formulated through individual student
comments and categories were broken into more specific themes, or subcategories.
Data was organized and charted to show themes specific to the three research questions
which adequately encompassed and summarized the data to be appropriate, exhaustive
and mutually exclusive. The conclusions drawn were developed from the constructs of
the qualitative data.

Member checking was used to start each subsequent interview. This strategy
ensured information and interpretation of information from previous interviews and
participant observations was correct. Asking for further clarification also led to
development of emergent questions based on the participant’s input and discussion of
the researcher’s interpretations.

Free List and Pile Sort

Participants listed characteristics describing the three themes from the research
questions:

1. What a good teacher has or is…………

2. What things a good teacher does, like methods of instruction……

3. How would you structure the day so students could best learn and be focused
on lessons………..

These characteristics were put on index cards and ranked by the students for
importance in providing successful educational practices. Using the pile sort technique,
students were asked to group and rank characteristics by their importance. Data then
was charted and numerically coded to determine the top 10 attributes for each of the three categories. Only the top 10 characteristics were used to aid in data manageability, as each of the three categories had over 20 attributes. The results of this charting were then coded into the categories developed in the semi-structured interviews, or new coding was added if needed to reflect the results of this activity. Students were also encouraged to give examples illustrating attributes in each of the three categories.

**Document Collection**

During the fourth interview, documents were reviewed with the participants. Tests, study sheets, and work sheets were examined and related to coding topics. Final semester grades were discussed with students and correlated to educational programming. These documents helped verify interview and observation analysis for triangulation and validity.

**Coding**

Organized lists of codes including a detailed description of each code, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and examples of real text for each were kept in a binder. MacQueen, McLellan, Kay, and Milstein (1998) believe that good codebooks are developed and refined as research goes along, so code lists in this research project were revisited after each round of observations or interviews to look for patterns. Coding started with separation into the three categories addressed by the research question. As more data was available through interviewing, codes were broken down into themes. Each coding category/theme had its own definition—what it sounded like and looked like. The goal of data analysis was to separate and reduce data by merging information into larger theme categories.
Data was color coded with each participant transcription printed on a different color of paper. Transcription was separated into the three large theme categories related to the three research question topics. This data was then broken down into smaller categories with data put on coding cards with enough information so it could be understood in context. Information on cards was easier to group and file and aided in accurate coding of data into smaller themes. Thus, cards allowed a display of the data and physical manipulation to organize it, facilitating investigation and analysis of the data.

Validity

According to Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte (1999), “Validity is the degree to which researchers have discovered what they think their results show, and how applicable the results are to other populations” (p. 271). Maxwell (1992) believes using different types of validity in qualitative research creates a feeling of authenticity in a study. When using descriptive field notes, the data becomes believable and factual. Interpretive validity uses member checking to make sure transcripts and interpretations of them are correct and reflect the beliefs of the participants. Theoretic validity uses the literature as a base to start analysis. Generalizability means the readers can generalize the research to their own settings. Evaluative validity means the study is trustworthy and believable which comes from precise documentation and detailed, rich data.

Strategies to estimate qualitative validity include member checking, triangulation, prolonged engagement and persistent observation, thick rich description, and clarification of researcher bias (Glesne, 1999; Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The following paragraphs illustrate these five strategies.
During member checking, participants are asked to make sure that what they have said has been accurately transcribed. Subjects are also asked to look at researcher interpretations to check that the analysis truly reflects their beliefs. In this study, member checking started each interview. This strategy demonstrated credibility by showing the research was believable from the perspective of the participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Triangulation increases both descriptive and interpretive validity when the researcher uses multiple methods to analyze data from multiple sources. “Designing a study in which multiple cases, multiple informants, or more than one data gathering method are used can greatly strengthen the study’s usefulness for other settings” (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). In this research project, a field notebook recorded descriptive (for descriptive validity), analytic (for interpretive validity) and personal impressions during the interviews and classroom observations. The in-class observations were valuable in checking the validity of the students’ statements in interviews as well as a guideline to generating conversations during the interview session. Document collection helps to confirm information gathered during participant observations and interviews. The use of multiple participants also helped to increase authenticity, as confirmability is the degree to which results could be corroborated by others (Guba & Lincoln, 1989.)

Prolonged engagement and persistent observation across a six month timeline provided extended time in the field for the researcher to learn the culture. This time lapse ensured that transcripts were accurate and that interpretation of the data was
corroborated by the participants. This allowed patterns to develop that showed persistence over time.

As another strategy for increased credibility, quotes were compiled that showed typical meaning or were especially insightful or of special interest. This helped in developing a thick, rich, description that will be perceived as authentic and will provide descriptive validity (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). These quotes aided in illustrating student voice as they provided direct links to student perceptions.

Glesne (1999) cautions the researcher to reflect on his/her own research bias. This reflection helps the researcher identify any subjectivity and monitor it in the research. This researcher kept a journal that noted analytic comments and personal notes. In this way, biases were explored. The advisor of this project also watched for any biases that may have shown in this research work.

Reliability

According to Schensul et al. (1999), reliability refers to “replicability of research results over time, with different sites and populations and with different researchers” (p. 271). Although the exact study with the same results is not possible in qualitative work, the researcher must provide enough detail so the study can be replicated. Delineating clearly all of the steps used in conducting a case study, including data analysis and links to interpretation, is central to ensuring reliability. As with any qualitative research, it may be difficult to verify this study can be generalized or transferred to another situation, population, or time. The reader would have to determine if the situations are similar and the findings could be true in another context (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).
Data Management

One of the challenges of qualitative research is data management. A large amount of data is accumulated and it all needs to be easily retrieved later. First the researcher needs to make sure that every document is saved and is dated and indexed so that place and purpose are noted. Interview transcription needs to be dated and numbered by lines or saved into folders on the computer. Printed material needs to be organized and kept in large binders by categories including:

1. Consent/assent letters (from parents, students, teachers, IRB, gatekeepers in the school district)
2. Participant observations
3. Interview transcriptions
4. Free list and pile sorting
5. Document collection
6. Cards developed during free list technique
7. Cards of themed interview transcriptions
8. Organized lists of codes

Limitations

This study examined the perceptions of students with emotional disturbance about their inclusion class experiences. However, students with ED may not be included in many general education classes at the high school level. Reasons for this may include the difficulty in handling the work-load in a general education class as students who are ED may have low academic levels which may cause frustration. This frustration may lead a student with ED to react in inappropriate ways to the stress of
meeting academic expectations. Students may also need more individualized customizing of work at the high school level. When students with ED are in special education classes with a low student/teacher ratio, they receive more help with work, and curriculum may be modified so that students experience more success. However, each student that participates in this study will be currently receiving academic instruction in at least one inclusion class, and will be asked about good and bad experiences in that class and other past general education classes.

Another limitation of the study is the accuracy of student responses because questions may examine historical school experiences. Also, students may exaggerate or embellish on stories to make them more interesting.

During participant observations, the researcher cannot observe and note *everything* that takes place. Consequently, there may be some subjectivity because the researcher will be recording what is believed to be important and because reality is only partially knowable.

As the population is small, included only one female, and the timeline is only six months, this information cannot be generalized as the opinion of all students identified as ED. Future research on the same topic with a larger population is recommended.

Researcher’s Role and Limitations

This researcher has taught students with emotional disturbance at the elementary level for twenty years. Because of the background working with students with this disability, the researcher hoped to easily develop a rapport because of
experiences and understanding of this special needs population. That also helped in interpreting observations and interviews with a high degree of validity.

As researcher values and attitudes are so different from a student who has aggressive tendencies and possibly anti-social behavior, the researcher needed to be alert to personal subjectivity (Glesne, 1999). The advisor for this study helped by reviewing this project to look for any threats to credibility due to bias in the researcher’s position. Member checking also aided the researcher in making sure interpretations of the data matched those of the participants and document collection helped provide educational input as well.

Summary of Educational Importance

Disruptive behaviors may interfere with academic and vocational success, as well as contribute to chronic maladjustment and unhappiness of everyone in the classroom—students with emotional disturbance, general education students, and teachers. If a student who has the potential to disrupt through aggressive talk or actions is calm and happy in the classroom, everyone benefits—students and teachers alike (Kadzin, 1987). School dropout rates among these students range from 50%-60%, and research shows that the social, academic, and vocational outcomes of students with ED who exit school programs is bleak (Edgar & Levine, 1987). If a child with ED stays in school, he has more opportunities later in life and his quality of life may be better.

Allowing students a voice in describing educational policies and teacher strategies may be seen as welcoming and motivating to students with emotional disturbance. The process may be empowering in providing students with a feeling of being valued. This study also has the potential to help teachers assess, understand, and
better serve students who are emotionally disturbed as it provides a link between students and educators.

Through the qualitative case study method, student voice in describing school experiences for students with emotional disturbance was analyzed. Student reflection identified approaches that may benefit students in the classroom regarding teacher style, classroom methods and discipline strategies. Results demonstrate what is deemed positive/negative by students with ED in educational settings.
CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

This chapter will present results of the analysis of the data collected during the study. The purpose of this study was to determine factors that students with emotional disturbance found favorable in the school setting. Nine high school students who demonstrated emotional disturbance, exhibited aggressive behavior, and were included in at least one general education class were asked to give their opinions about teachers, the educational setting, and school discipline. Over a six month period, students were observed in one general education class and interviewed 3 to 5 times. Interview styles varied among structured, semi-structured, free list, and pile sort. Other data for this study included researcher field notes and educational documents including class syllabi, study guides, tests, worksheets, discipline reports, and grade cards.

Three research questions guided the study:

1. According to students who are identified as having emotional disturbance, what components of a teacher’s teaching style are considered positive and negative strategies in working with students with severe emotional disturbance?

2. According to students with ED, how can the classroom environment be structured to best help the student learn?
3. According to the student with ED, what specific discipline/classroom management practices aid in keeping the student focused on learning?

Data were analyzed qualitatively so that individual voice could be heard. Strategies to ensure qualitative validity included member checking in asking participants to review researcher notes and inferences for accuracy, prolonged engagement over a 6-month period, and persistent observation during three to five interviews. Additional approaches included participant observation, document analysis, and a field notebook containing detailed descriptive, analytic, and reflective field notes to aid in the triangulation process to ensure validity. By evaluating nine participants, study results were strengthened because data was provided from multiple cases.

After the participant observation, the first interview with each student was tailored to discuss specific occurrences in the inclusion classroom (see Appendix F). Interviewing employed both structured and semi-structured questioning (see Appendix G listing interview questions for interviews #1-5.) Dialogue expanded upon researcher questions about activities observed, teacher interactions with the students, and discipline and homework policies in the classroom. Students were asked to discuss characteristics they liked and disliked about the teacher and identify the teacher as a “good” or “bad” teacher. The next interview asked students for free lists about the three research questions, as well as in-depth discussion of the best and worst interactions participants had at school with their teachers. This interview also asked for students’ suggestions for strategies teachers could implement when a student is having a “bad day.” The fourth interview solicited answers to demographic questions
such as grade in school, preferences of learning styles, goals in life, etc. Participants were also asked to rank through pile sorting the free list cards listing answers for the three research questions. The final interview was a discussion about classroom documents and asking students for explanations and examples relating to the top 10 responses of each free list/pile sort for the three research questions. Students were also requested to provide advice to teachers when working with students who are emotionally disturbed.

To gather data for the first research question, “According to students who are identified as having emotional disturbance, what components of a teacher’s teaching style are considered positive and negative strategies in working with students with severe emotional disturbance,” participants were asked to develop a free list of characteristics to describe a teacher’s teaching style (see Appendix H for the list of 22 examples given). Responses were then put on cards so participants could rank them in order of personal importance. For data manageability, only the top 10 ranked responses were then used. Table 3 shows the top 10 teacher desirable characteristics students chose in working with students who demonstrated emotional disturbance.

### Table 3

Top Ten Rankings: Qualities of a Good Teacher’s Teaching Style

1. A teacher should not be stuck-up.
2. A good teacher thinks you can do well and wants you to pass.
3. A good teacher is someone you can joke with.

(\textit{table continues})
Table 3 (continued)

4. A good teacher is patient.

5. A good teacher is respectful.

6. A good teacher knows how to talk/relate to kids.

7. A teacher should have a good personality.

8. A good teacher makes the class fun.

9. A good teacher trusts and believes you.

10. A good teacher is nice.

Students were then asked to give examples to illustrate each of the top 10 rankings. Analysis revealed three broad categories or areas of impact on students: (a) Teacher’s Relationship and Interactions with Students, (b) Characteristics of Teachers, and (c) Negative Practices. Within each of these broad categories, patterns emerged that generated subcategories or themes. Teacher’s Relationship and Interactions with Students generated three student developed themes: (a) the teacher should not be stuck-up, (b) the teacher should be encouraging, and (c) the teacher should be supportive. Characteristics of Teachers included three themes: (a) patience, (b) humor, and (c) helpfulness. Negative Practices by Teachers mentioned by students were broken into two themes: (a) unfairness and (b) punitive.

The second research question, “According to students with ED, how can the classroom environment be structured to best help the student learn?” explored students’ perceptions of current classroom methods which helped them stay engaged in learning. Participants were asked to develop a free list of methods teachers use to structure the
classroom environment (see Appendix H for the list of 20 examples given.) Responses were then put on cards so participants could rank them in order of importance. Table 4 shows the top 10 student picks of favorite methods for structuring the classroom environment for research question 2.

Table 4
Top Ten Rankings: Structuring Classroom Environment

1. It’s good to work with a partner to get feedback.
2. Class work should be hands-on.
3. A good teacher helps you study for tests.
4. Group work is good.
5. Schoolwork should be personally relevant.
6. It’s good to have little or no homework.
7. A teacher should let you do other homework when class work is done.
8. A teacher should make the class fun.
9. A teacher should give less notes and reading out of the book.
10. Computer use is good.

Students were then asked to give specific examples to illustrate each of the top 10 rankings. Data analysis then revealed three broad categories or areas of impact on students: (a) Work Helpful to Students, (b) Interesting Work, and (c) Meaningful Work. Within these broad categories, subcategories were noted. Work Helpful to Students was broken into (a) work with peers, (b) help students study for tests, and (c)
homework. Interesting Work included factors of (a) varied approaches and (b) engaging methods; while Meaningful Work included the themes (a) relevance to student and (b) teacher enthusiasm.

Data gathered for the third research question, “According to the student with ED, what specific discipline/classroom management practices aid in keeping the student focused on learning,” also included a free list of strategies (see Appendix H for the list of 23 examples). Responses were ranked, and Table 5 shows the top 10 discipline practices students ranked as personally important.

Table 5
Top Ten Rankings: Discipline/Classroom Management

1. A teacher should allow eating and drinking in class.
2. You should be able to choose where you sit.
3. You should be allowed to listen to music with headphones to help concentration.
4. Students should not have to wear ID’s.
5. If you goof off in class, a good teacher joins in.
6. Too many teachers show favoritism to some students.
7. A good teacher pushes you to do well.
8. Dress code is not important.
9. Students can get work done while talking.
10. Inappropriate language should not be punished.
Students were then asked to give specific instances to illustrate each of the top 10 rankings. Analysis of the data revealed four broad categories: (a) Rules, (b) Positive Discipline Strategies, (c) Consequences, and (d) Strategies to Help Students When Having a “Bad Day.” Specific themes within these categories were generated. Rules included (a) general building rules and (b) classroom preferences. Positive Discipline Strategies generated themes on (a) interactions between teachers and students and (b) rewards and structure. Consequences looked at student opinions of punishments, while Strategies to Help Students When Having a “Bad Day” included (a) successful interventions by teachers, (b) unsuccessful interventions by teachers, and (c) talking to an adult about the problem.

Research Question 1: According to students who are identified as having emotional disturbance, what components of a teacher’s teaching style are considered positive and negative strategies in working with students with severe emotional disturbance?

Students revealed broad categories and subcategories related to a teacher’s teaching style which impact students. The results of data analysis are shown in table 6.

Table 6

Research Question 1: Coding Categories and Themes

1. Teacher’s Relationship and Interactions with Students
   a. The teacher should not be stuck-up
   b. The teacher should be encouraging
   c. The teacher should be supportive

(table continues)
Table 6 (continued)

2. Characteristics of Teachers
   a. Patience
   b. Humor
   c. Helpfulness

3. Negative Practices by Teachers
   a. Unfairness
   b. Punitive

Teacher’s Relationship and Interactions with Students

_The Teacher Should Not Be Stuck-Up_

When participants were asked to list and rank components of a teacher’s teaching style that they considered important in working with students, they determined the most important characteristic was that a teacher not be stuck-up. Students illustrated the term “stuck-up” through various descriptions of teachers. Dominick, a 16 year-old White male, explains that a stuck-up teacher is “an old teacher wearing a suit and tie. He’s harsh, strict, gives a lot of work, and tries to act perfect. He is a perfect vision of a perfectionist, and that just makes me want to rebel” (1-30-06). Other students substantiated the concept of strictness as a negative component of teaching style. Jeremy, a 16 year-old African American, (11-10-05) explains, “They just can’t be stuck-up, like ‘I the teacher, you gotta listen to me.’ I don’t like that … They not the boss. Well they boss at that point, but if they want someone to really
listen to them, they shouldn’t be bossy.” Sam, also 16 years-old and Arabic, reported, “A teacher should be cool, laid back, not totally care about what you do” (1-30-06).

In analysis of the data from field notes and interviews, students consistently mentioned the accessibility of teachers and the need for teachers to be approachable. Ricky, a 17 year-old White male, (1-30-06) said he believes stuck-up “teachers act like they know more than the students, and when students ask for help they say, ‘Why don’t you know this? You’re not stupid!’ but maybe the students just don’t understand it and need help with further explanation.” Jeremy (10-11-05) illustrates the need for students to be able to work directly with the teacher. He describes his inclusion teacher in a positive way, as he likes “how she reacts to the kids, everybody in the class. Like different personalities, she know how to work with this kid, how to work with that one. I mean she more friendly as a teacher overall.”

Participants also describe the friendliness of teachers who are not stuck-up as a positive approach to working with students who are emotionally disturbed. The site observation showed Jeremy’s teacher with a big smile. She shows affection for her students when calling them by name or calling them “hon.” Mikey’s teacher waits for his students in the hall to greet them. This friendliness can also be exhibited by showing interest in students as people. Jeremy (11-10-05) states, “You know if a teacher is more like a friend, you’re gonna listen to them more often…. Hey, what’s up? How you doin’ today? How was your weekend? How’s your parents? Just like small things like that, that let you know they really care about you more than they just care about you inside of school.” Jeremy (10-11-05) compliments his teacher: “I think she has a good way of teaching like more of a friend than a teacher. And that’s real
cool. I like that…. Like she be real nice. And she act like she’s your friend. It’s like she IS my friend. It’s like one minute we talk about art and then we doing a project and then we can talk about outside school things.” Ali agrees and explains that, “Teachers gotta get in touch with their students by asking about your week-end. They want to know what’s going on” (11-10-05). Tim (11-11-05) feels it’s important that teachers “know how to talk to the kids. Relate to the kids.” When asked about the teacher’s use of what might be considered inappropriate language in class, Tim, 16 year-old African American, portrayed that as fairly common in teachers at the high school. “Yes. I guess at the high school level they do it to relate to the students so they are on their level” (10-24-05).

These characteristics support conclusions from previous research done by Garlick (1990), Greco (1993), Crowley (1993), and Jaknukainen (2000) that asked students with emotional disturbance to identify characteristics of the ideal teacher. Those students listed qualities such as “nice” and “friendly” which relates easily to examples given in this study showing qualities of a teacher who is not stuck-up.

**The Teacher Should Be Encouraging**

Student participants ranked “thinks you can do well and wants you to pass” as the second most important teacher characteristic for teachers working with exceptional students. However, participants held vastly different beliefs in ways teachers would communicate this high regard to their students. Sam believes that a teacher should be harsh with students to get them to expend their best efforts. When asked about his inclusion teacher, Sam (1-30-06) states, “He know how to teach and he pushes kids to the limit where they get sick and tired of him yelling. So you do good just to prove
him wrong.” He further explains “a nice teacher gives respect by … helping you in school with homework. They think you can do well and communicate that by giving you extra credit and pushing you to do good in school. They do that by yelling at you. If they don’t yell and talk nice, kids ignore them…. [I prefer that they] get mad at me and help me do the work. They care about how you do in school … in all your classes. Help you with homework if you need help” (11-10-05).

Sam’s view that it is helpful for a teacher to yell to encourage a student to do his best in school did not fit any conclusions from previous research. This contradicts what has been found in the literature review; specifically it does not support Sutherland’s (2000) research that shows the positive effect of praise rather than yelling. Possibly, Sam feels that yelling helps him finish his work because he experiences with this style of interaction with other adults in his life. It is important to note that Sam is the only participant in the study who feels this way.

Other participants describe good teachers as helpful in steering you towards success through other methods. Jeremy (11-10-05) concurs with Sam’s statement that a good teacher helps with homework and also asks that “if a student really needs help or something and he really don’t understand, don’t just blow him off.” Sam believes a teacher should talk to you and help you with homework after school so that you can pass. “That’s when a teacher really cares about you. When a teacher doesn’t care, they don’t bother to talk to you about anything” (1-30-06). Ricky (1-30-06) agrees that staying after school may be helpful if you get a bad grade on a quiz and the teacher helps re-explain the material before taking a test over it. Nick, (1-30-06) a White 15 year-old, believes that a teacher should help you study and go over material learned in
class by giving you a study guide. In this way, the teacher helps you pass because you have the opportunity to prepare for a test so you can do your best. Jeremy values the personal interaction when the teacher assists and encourages each individual. “She talks to everybody. She’ll tell you if you put too much paint on it or if you did something wrong. She’ll tell you. She wouldn’t sit down there and just let you do it and make you look stupid. She’ll tell everybody. She don’t just talk to certain people” (10-11-05).

What participants articulate here about teachers helping students find success through personal encouragement supports research by Glasser (1969) who believes teachers should help and nurture students in a caring way. This also relates to White’s (1995) findings that teachers need to be caring and concerned, as personality of the teacher is the critical factor in a successful classroom.

*The Teacher Should Be Supportive*

Participants stress when a teacher shows respect to students it is a way to communicate high regard for students. However, they differ on ways that teachers should show this support. Nick (1-30-06) believes showing a personal interest is the best way to communicate positive regard. Teachers should say “Hi” and “How are you?” and ask, “What are your interests?” Sam (1-30-06) believes when teachers call you by name and ask if you need help they are showing respect to students. Ricky (11-10-05) asks that teachers “give you the facts and their opinion and then you can form your own decisions. They treat you like an adult and not a 4-year-old. Which I’ve had happen and it is not fun.” Sam (1-30-06) requests teachers “don’t put you down in class or say your grades in class. That’s an invasion of privacy.” However, when
asked how a teacher could communicate that he respects students, Dominick (1-30-06) insists he “doesn’t want respect, but rather someone that likes to joke around.”

The literature base supports the need for a teacher to communicate support of students by demonstrating a personal interest as described by these students. Many researchers document the importance of developing teacher-student relationships to aid in building empathy and rapport (Mendes, 2003; Pigford, 2000; Gootman & DeClaire, 2001; Rogers & Renard, 1999). Hutchinson (2003) believes that if the student feels respected and supported in the classroom, the learner also develops higher self-esteem.

Another way to communicate support for students is for teachers to trust and believe their students.

You gotta trust the teacher and they gotta trust you. The teacher be like, ‘OK, Jeremy, do you promise you gonna get the work done?’ I be like ‘yeah.’ And they could trust me to do it. Or they could say ‘I gonna help you’ and I have to trust them when they say ‘I’m gonna help you.’ (11-10-05)

Sam (1-30-06) believes a supportive teacher will “trust you in the hallway to not get in trouble.” Nick (1-30-06) says it’s important for teachers to believe you when you are accused of something and it’s not true. Ricky describes an incident when the teacher showed trust when he said he “just got here. They will believe you weren’t smoking” (1-30-06). These participants feel valued by teachers who express faith in their students.

Dominick describes the support a teacher can give a student. He finds it an advantage, “when a teacher encourages you by telling you ‘you’re doing a good job’ or ‘you need to try harder.’” (1-30-06). Dominick feels that positive verbal reinforcement motivates him to do his best because he likes the personal attention from
his teacher. The site observation showed Jeremy’s inclusion teacher was enthusiastic about students’ art work, exclaiming, “That’s awesome!”

Characteristics of Teachers

Patience

Teacher patience as a positive attribute was mentioned frequently by the participants. Nick (1-30-06) explains teachers should “not give up on you the first time you mess up—in behavior, grades on the test, anything.” Dominick (1-30-06) requested, “I might do stuff that might be annoying, so be patient with me.” Sam stressed patience in helping students with coursework and following directions, stating, “If I don’t understand, keep explaining without flipping out” (1-30-06). Ricky clarified patience in a good teacher also meant being flexible to student concerns. “They’re understanding like if you were given an assignment that was due in two days, and you couldn’t do it because someone was sick or your computer broke down, they’ll give you some time to make it up. But if you say “I forgot” or “I had to work,” that doesn’t work” (11-10-05). Ricky felt that if the student had late work with a legitimate excuse, a good teacher would understand and make an exception to the rule.

Students feel patience and understanding is evident if the teacher is flexible in working with students. This is backed in research studies, as both Garlick (1990) and Greco (1993) found patience as one of the top characteristics desired in students having emotional disturbance.

Humor

Data analysis of field notes and interviews showed humor to be an important teacher characteristic, with eight of the nine student participants commenting and
giving details about humor in a teacher. Site observations showed teacher use of humor in many inclusion classrooms. Mikey’s teacher joked and teased students as they entered the room, while Ricky’s teacher told corny jokes to keep the interest of students. Tim’s and Sa’s inclusion teachers used sarcasm as a way to engage students. Nick (1-30-06) explains humor, “If it’s racist or sexist it’s not tolerated as appropriate for school. However, appropriate jokes for school are cool.” Ricky (1-30-06) shares a humorous moment in his inclusion class, “There was this one time in Mr. Smith’s class. He said, ‘The ocean trench is 11,000 meters.’ He said, ‘This is one meter (and demonstrated with a meter stick). That’s a lot.’ And I said, ‘No shit’, and he laughed.” When talking about a good teacher, Sam (11-10-05) describes a teacher with a sense of humor: “He made everybody laugh. He helped you with the work and when you were done you could do whatever; just sit around and talk and he was funny.” Tim (10-24-05) concurs, “Yeah he’s always smiling and he talks and jokes a lot. He’s like a good teacher.” Mikey, a 15 year-old White male, gives details about his inclusion teacher:

So like Mr. Jones is a goof-off and outgoing and he lets you all goof off as long as you don’t get too rowdy and get hurt on the machines. Like if you’re a goof-off, he’ll goof off with you. I mean he’s a fun teacher to have. I like teachers being like more outgoing. Don’t make you just sit there and do work, like if you goof off a little bit he won’t yell at you (10-17-05).

Participants mentioned being able to joke with teachers as a positive characteristic. Dominick (1-30-06) shares, “I like to joke a lot, so the teacher should joke around and not be all stuck up. Not always work. Know how to chill.” Ricky (1-30-06) believes, “They should be able to take a joke. Not like when Ms. Quail was not there and the sub [substitute teacher] writes me up.” Sam (1-30-06) shares, “Mr. Goode
(teacher of students with special needs) calls me ‘OK, Sammy, Sammy,’ and I say ‘OK, Weirdo.’ That’s how every teacher should be. Not flip out if you say one little word.”

This data further supports the uses of humor documented in literature as a positive attribute in the classroom. Students articulate that humor is helpful in several ways; this relates easily to studies showing humor: can increase student attention in class (McNally, 2004; Sanchez, 1998), can lighten the tone of the classroom by reducing anger and aggression, and provide stress relief (Forbes, 1997; Mitchell & McNally, 2004.)

Helpfulness

Data analysis shows students desire teachers who assist students with their work. Sam describes his least-liked teacher as one who would not help him in class. Ali, a 16 year-old African-American female, shares her interactions with an unhelpful inclusion teacher:

Researcher: Do you think the teacher is helpful when you work on computers in the media center?

Ali: No. Miss Malone, like, when you ask for help, she don’t give you the help you need. She makes it, if you ask a question, she won’t even explain it to you. She, I don’t even think she does. Like a good help for me, anyway.

Researcher: Does she help other people? Is it just you she doesn’t help?
Ali: Yeah. Because she know what type of classes I’m in. So she feel like that’s not her job to explain something to me one-on-one. Because she think I can go back to my other teachers for help. Just like when we testing. We had a test yesterday, and she was like, do you need to go down to Ms. Quail (the teacher of students with special needs) so she can like help you with the test? She don’t have time for me.

Researcher: So did you go down?

Ali: Uh, huh.

Researcher: What do you like or dislike about this inclusion teacher? Is this a good or a bad teacher and why?

Ali: I just don’t think she understands. I mean, we never got off on the right foot. So, like in my area, she’s clueless. She’s very clueless.

Researcher: Well if you were going to tell her what to do to be a better teacher, what would you tell her to do.

Ali: Understand that every student in there is different. And as far as your job, you know, understand what you’re doing.

Researcher: Well, what would she be doing to show that she understood you? Would she be talking to you about your personal life or about school?

Ali: No, just check out each thing. Look me up on the computer or something or hear from the staff that I’m in the special ed. department. You know. And by her knowing that she should at least come to me individually and help me.

(10-06-05)
Site observation showed that Ali’s teacher helped one person exclusively during class. The other students worked on computers and did not ask for help, but many seemed to be struggling with the work and were seen asking other students for assistance. Other teachers made an attempt to answer questions of all students in the class, such as Ricky’s teacher walking around and reviewing everyone’s lab papers so he was available for assistance, and Kyle’s teacher helping students run an accounting problem on computers.

Another way that teachers can be helpful is by showing flexibility with allowing students some leeway. Kyle’s teacher was seen in the site observation allowing students to go to their lockers to get forgotten homework. Dominick’s teacher had a supply of paper that he allowed a student to use when the student forgot his notebook in his locker. Rather than punishing the student by maintaining strict rules related to work in the classroom, both teachers smoothed the way for the students by allowing them participation in class without penalty for forgetting materials.

In this passage, students articulate the need for a teacher to be helpful in the classroom and give examples of ways a teacher can accomplish that goal. This relates to relationship-driven teaching (Rogers & Renard, 1999) which suggests a teacher communicate caring about students both personally and educationally.

**Negative Practices by Teachers**

*Unfairness*

Many students felt they had run-ins with teachers which were unwarranted. The participants gave details of stories illustrating ways they perceived these teachers were unfair to them. Mikey (1-11-06) recounts an incident, “Like this kid, he do
something and another day later another kid do something. And it’s like the same thing. And I do something. And they never got in trouble, but I got in trouble for the same thing.” Sam (1-30-06) states, “I hate teachers who are mean—do the work or get the hell out of her class. And she’s nice to some kids but hates you.” Tim (11-10-05) shares memories of a teacher he had who was unreasonable: “I probably could be talking and she’d kick me out. I could stop talking….I didn’t even have to be talking, someone could be talking to me and I could be listening. And it’d be like, ‘Tim, get out’…They could have talked to me instead of this shit.” Mikey described an incident between himself and a substitute teacher:

There’s boundary lines with him. He told me he said to sit down four or five times and I never did, I guess, cause I had the headphones on, he said I could listen to. I didn’t hear him, so he came up and grabbed me in my ribs and then I turned around and told him not to touch me no more. Well, he went and told the principal I said the ‘F’ word like five or six times and that I told him if he touches me again I’d punch him in the nose or something like that. So I was like ‘whatever’ and I got suspended for eight days for that. (11-14-05)

Jeremy (1-11-06) shares, “Like in 8th grade when I was in study hall, I was quiet but I kept getting in trouble. None of the other kids did, but because I was quiet teachers picked on me.” Ricky (1-11-06) gives details of an incident he considered unfair in 5th grade that caused him to be suspended. “I didn’t really know what I had said until I got in trouble. My friend was going through a divorce so I think they could have been a little more lenient.” In another incident, Ricky explains that he had late homework in 8th grade that the teacher threw away.

She decided to fail me just because she didn’t like me. I would turn my work in to her and she would throw it away….It was late because I was out because I was sick and because my mom was in an accident….I was thinking ‘how understanding and caring of you,’ and a few other choice and colorful words…
She accused me of putting glue in her grade book. Ha. I called her a bitch and then walked away. (1-30-06)

Dominick (11-06-05) feels he is labeled because he is in classes for students with special needs and teachers sometimes target his behavior unfairly. “Being put in these classes, maybe sometimes if I get a consequence I know I shouldn’t have gotten, I’ll fight back.”

These responses from participants may reinforce the need for cognitive therapy (Beck, 1976, 1999; Burns, 1990) and rational emotive therapy (Ellis & Bernard, 1983), as the students may be reacting to a reality that is distorted by erroneous assumptions. Adolescents identified as emotionally disturbed may need to identify self-deceptions that lead into troubling situations, as evidenced by the fact that in many of these student accounts, students were not aware of what they were doing that caused a problem. Bandura (1973) recommends counseling or social skills program to help aggressors learn new ways to end violence. These examples of unfairness may also relate to students who put their locus of control outside of themselves and blame others for their anger problems (Field & Hoffman, 1994.)

**Punitive**

Data analysis shows students reacting negatively to teachers who yell at students. According to Jeremy:

A bad teacher would be yelling and screaming. Butting into people’s business … yeah, if somebody’s talking about drugs or killin’ people or things like that, yeah, people can jump in. But if it’s small things about what we gonna do after school or hangin’ out with my girlfriend, I honestly think that nobody should jump into that. ‘Cause it’s none of their business. Like me for example. Probably this year, I hadn’t got into so many arguments ‘cause I don’t get into other people’s business. ‘Cause that’s your business, I don’t butt into it. If you tell me about it, I ask your
permission to tell it to anybody else. If you say yes, then if I feel like it, I will tell someone if they ask me. If you say no, then that’s his business, and he say no. (10-11-05)

Jeremy (11-10-05) describes the teachers at his previous school: “The teachers was just like mean. They just snide and mean. Like once you out of school, they don’t even care about you.” Nick (11-14-05) and Sam (1-17-06) add a teacher who yells is the worst.

Dominick expresses his opinion of his least-favorite teacher. “Miss Lunas was so strict. Oh my God. Had to do good. Had to be perfect and all sorts of other stuff. [If I didn’t follow the rules] she’d make sure that I knew that I didn’t. Like if I did something wrong, she’d like, you know, detention here or there. Sometimes I didn’t deserve that detention, but she yells and makes me angry” (11-14-05).

Mikey tells about a teacher he considered too harsh: “If you got out of hand you were sent straight to the office. She’s a teacher that got me suspended a lot for doing nothing. She’d like yell as soon as you come into the classroom, even if the bell hasn’t rang yet to start school, now you gotta be quiet” (1-14-06).

Site observation showed Sam’s teacher as negative in interactions with Sam. The teacher made disparaging remarks about Sam to me in front of Sam, and used sarcasm as a way to chastise Sam for being late turning in an assignment. This teacher also repeatedly ignored attempts by Sam to get the teacher’s attention to turn in late work.

Punitive behavior and yelling by a teacher would relate to social learning theory (Bandura, 1973). This type of behavior is a style of aggression that students may pattern from watching adults with the same style. Students with ED and aggressive
behavior need role models who do not reinforce aggression in any form. This also addresses Goleman’s (1995) belief that teachers need emotional intelligence, as the teacher’s aggressive behavior may escalate misbehavior in a student having emotional disturbance. Mendes (2003) supports students dislike of punitive behavior by teachers, as his research found coercion has a negative effect as a style of discipline because it allows students to blame the teacher and leads to misbehavior.

**Summary for Research Question #1**

Data analysis for the research question, “According to students who are identified as having emotional disturbance, what components of a teacher’s teaching style are considered positive and negative strategies in working with students with severe emotional disturbance” revealed three broad categories students consistently mentioned in this research study: Teacher’s Relationship and Interactions with Students, Characteristics of Teachers, and Negative Practices. Although incidents related to these categories are frequently discussed, participants do not always agree on favorable practices. There are negative cases that show each student has definite opinions on teaching styles they find a help and/or a hindrance in the classroom.

**Research Question 2.** According to students with emotional disturbance, how can the classroom environment be structured to best help the student learn?

Students revealed broad categories and subcategories related to structuring the classroom environment as it impacts students. The results of data analysis are shown in table 7.
Table 7
Research Question 2: Coding Categories and Themes

1. Work Helpful to Students
   a. Work with peers
   b. Help students study for tests
   c. Homework

2. Interesting Work
   a. Varied approaches
   b. Engaging methods

3. Meaningful Work
   a. Relevance to student
   b. Teacher enthusiasm

Work Helpful to Students

Work with Peers

When listing and ranking methods students prefer in the classroom, the first choice is working with a partner for feedback and help. Several participants mentioned the benefits a partner could give them. Nick (1-30-06) describes, “A partner helps me get the right answer because they can explain it to me,” and Sam (1-30-06) concurs, “Say they’re smarter; they can get the answer to you.” Jeremy talks about the relationship he shares with his partner in art class:

So practically, we always helped each other out. He’s more of a cartoon drawer, and I was more of a graffiti drawer. So like I don’t know how to do cartoons, so he helped me with cartoons. He didn’t know how to do graffiti, so
I helped him with grafitti. So that’s how we do it, we just flip it off…. The teacher allows us to work with other people, but you gotta do separate things. Like if I think something’s wrong with his, I’ll probably change his and put it in and see what he thinks about it. And vice versa. (10-11-05)

Site observation in Jeremy’s class showed students helping each other with their artwork. Some students share that they prefer working with a partner for social reasons. Dominick (1-30-06) shares, “Then you can hang out while you’re doing work as long as it’s someone you know and you get to choose your own partner.”

Other students mentioned group work as a method of teaching but shared mixed opinions about it. Jeremy (11-10-05) likes working with others in “more of a group. Because everybody could get disgusted if they’re stuck on one question and I know it. He could be like ‘explain this to me’ because I know it.” Dominick (1-30-06) believes that the group work viewed in the site observation helped him with his final grade in class: “My health project kind of helped me pass.” Sam (1-30-06) agrees, but states, “Group work is good, but I don’t remember doing it, it’s been so long.” Ricky cautions that group work is not always a positive for him. “I’m antisocial, but it depends on the group. Five [members in the group] at most; otherwise I’d rather work by myself” (1-30-06).

This is in agreement with research done by King-Sears (1997) who advocates cooperative learning as a best practice in inclusive classrooms. Working with peers allows students to help each other with academics. Dugan and Kamps (1995) believe cooperative learning encourages students to rely on each other and teaches social skills which may be especially beneficial for students having emotional disturbance.
Helps Students Study for Tests

Data analysis showed participants wanted help from the teacher in studying for tests. Participants had numerous suggestions of methods for reviewing material before assessment. Ricky, Dominick, Nick, and Sam (1-30-06) discussed the need for a study guide, telling you what pages to go over in the book, and what material is important to learn. Ricky also suggested the teacher “answer questions until everyone understands the material.” Nick recommended review games, while Sam advised a help session after school. “They have you go to class after school to go over the notes and the book chapter,” or “they let you study for the test….make a group like two or three.” As most students said they do not do any homework outside of the school day, this method may help them earn better grades on tests. Field notes showed Ricky’s inclusion teacher offering to help students after school to make up missed labs and review for tests.

Homework

Another top request of participants was that teachers assign little or no homework. Most participants either stated they never got homework, or never did it outside of school. Ricky explains, “In the past, I’ve never done it. If they require it, have students do it in class so if I have a question I can ask them.” Dominick shares, “I don’t have homework now. I could probably do it if I had some, but it puts less on me. I used to not be able to do homework but now with meds I can do it.” Sam gives another reason for curbing homework assignments, “You can go hang out with your friends. You don’t have to worry about the next day. It’s more relaxing.” Nick illustrates the problems with homework, “That’s how I fail classes…with homework
and tests.” Kyle, a 15 year-old White male, (10-17-05) states, “I try to avoid homework at all costs, because I know if I get homework I won’t do it. Because as soon as I get home, I go to work and don’t get home until 2:00 [a.m.]” According to data analysis and field notes, in the classes for students with special needs, the teachers do not assign homework and also find time to help students finish homework assigned in inclusion classes. (1-30-06)

Interesting Work

Varied Approaches

When students listed and ranked methods they preferred in structuring the classroom environment, hands-on work was highly desired. Ricky (1-30-06) shares his thoughts on his inclusion class, “Science is usually hands-on and I love science. I love Legos or dissection so if someone doesn’t want to do it, I’m like ‘I’ll do it.’” Field notes of his inclusion class documented hands-on activities and high student involvement using spectroscopes. Dominick (11-14-05) recommends, “Hands-on. You just go and do it. Explain it a little bit first.” Sam has a differing opinion about hands-on work: “I like it but they make us do weird projects” (1-30-06).

Data analysis (1-30-06) showed different learning styles as Ricky states, “It is good to have concise notes because it helps me remember. I don’t like just reading out of the book.” Sam tells, “I would rather read than take notes.” Nick shares his preference, “It depends on your learning style. Me, I see things and remember it.” Individuals showed partialities to certain approaches, without a consensus of what the group required.
Students shared pros and cons about using computers (1-30-06). Ricky liked using the computer: “I prefer typing for organization. I can save to file and it’s always there.” Although Nick also likes computer work, Ali and Sam admitted they were not comfortable with much time on the computers because they did not have computers at home and they do not feel proficient. Field notes showed Ali unfocused in her inclusion class in completing an activity on the computer. And Sam concurs, stating, “I’m not a computer freak.”

Ricky recommends movies as a way to keep students’ interest in the material being taught. He tells about his inclusion teacher’s use of videos in class: “He shows us odd little clips of things and if we’ve been good enough, he’ll show movies of what we’ve been learning” (10-17-05).

These student comments support relationship-driven teaching (Rogers & Renard, 1999) which advocates challenging activities using various approaches. Prater (2003) also found students become more engaged when class work is active, and Gardner (1993) suggests work reaching different intelligences of children. As an added bonus, if the students are on-task because the work is interesting, there will be less discipline problems in the classroom.

**Engaging Methods**

Participants believe the teacher should be funny in class and also use methods that make the work fun and engaging. Tim (11-10-05) shares he likes, “Fun projects to do to keep us active. You know, like less boring notes and bookwork. And when they play games and help us with tests and stuff…. It could be games about the lessons they did.” Nick (1-30-06) agrees playing games or computer work makes the day more
interesting, and Sam (1-30-06) suggests making the class fun, “by saying jokes, having word search puzzles, and watching movies.”

Even studying for a test using a study guide can be made more appealing. Ricky cites an example describing his inclusion teacher: “There are times when we’re working on a study guide. He’ll put on some really crazy music or he’ll tell a funny story. And most of us will remember it because of the music or the story” (1-30-06). Ricky compares that teacher to his biology teacher last year (in monotone), “OK class, this is what we’re gonna do. Second period, he’s yelling at us not to fall asleep. He’s got the lights out while we’re taking notes, and he’s using one tone of voice. How does he expect us not to fall asleep?” (10-17-05)

Students articulate that humor helps keep their attention on the lessons and allows them to easily remember information when presented in a humorous way. This reinforces Sanchez’s (1998) belief that humor keeps student attention because students are watching to see what comes next.

Meaningful Work

Relevance to Student

Participants listed and ranked “schoolwork should be personally relevant” as an important component of the classroom environment. However, participants claim it is not a frequent occurrence. Ricky (1-30-06) explains, “Science is relevant for me, but that’s about it,” and Sam (1-30-06) believes although relevance is important, “Yeah, but it doesn’t happen very often.” Jeremy expands on his thoughts about relevance:

Like art classes for example, they know we can’t learn just from reading in a book. So they gotta find a way to do it so everybody comprehends so that would be a good way. You know, peer through the eyes of something different.
If that person is a skateboarder, take the story that we’re reading about and put it in skateboard terms. Like that. Just small things like that. (11-10-05)

Students relate they do not believe most school work is relevant to their lives, although research shows it should be. Relationship-driven teaching (Rogers & Renard, 1999) says valuable work must fill a need or solve a problem, and Glasser (1969) believes that students should do useful work so it is motivating. None of the students mentioned having a voice in determining curriculum or methods of teaching, which would fit expectations of a constructivist classroom (Brooks & Brooks 1993), which might also help students become more involved in classroom activities they feel are relevant. Another way of bringing relevance to students might be through using interdisciplinary units where holistic learning gives work a purpose (Jenkins, 2005; Zemelman et al., 1980).

Teacher Enthusiasm

Ricky (10-17-05) relates if the teacher is excited about the material, it becomes more real to the students. He compliments the methods his inclusion teacher uses in class: “Pretty much everything I like. The way he acts, the way he explains it, the way he gets into it.” He also likes that the teacher gives the facts, but allows the students to form their own opinions.

Summary for Research Question #2

Analysis of the second research question, “According to students with emotional disturbance, how can the classroom environment be structured to best help the students learn?” revealed methods the participants felt helped keep them engaged in learning. Specifically, three broad categories were found and described. Work Helpful
to Students explored methods that allowed students to work with their peers, study for tests and complete homework. Interesting Work included varied and engaging approaches to learning, while Meaningful Work cited examples of teacher enthusiasm and making the work relevant to students which were helpful in engaging students. However, when students identified strategies and ranked them, there were disparities between individual students. There was no one consensus of what strategies were most effective for all the participants who were interviewed.

Research Question 3. According to the student with emotional disturbance, what specific discipline/classroom management practices aid in keeping the student focused on learning?

Students revealed broad categories and subcategories related to specific discipline/classroom management practices which impact students. The results of data analysis are shown in Table 8.

Table 8

Research Question 3: Coding Categories and Themes

1. Rules
   a. General building rules
   b. Classroom preferences

2. Positive Discipline Strategies
   a. Interactions between teachers and students
   b. Rewards and structure

(table continues)
Table 8 (continued)

3. Strategies to Help Students When Having a “Bad Day”

a. Successful interventions by teachers

b. Unsuccessful interventions by teachers

c. Talking to an adult about the problem

Rules

*Building Rules*

Jeremy: Strict is not a good word, you know what I say?

Researcher: If you were the teacher, what rules and consequences would you have?

Jeremy: That’s a hard question. ‘Cause some rules are basic. Like no drugs in school. No fighting. But I think they don’t look more on the careful side. They pick out the smaller things. They pick out the things that are easiest. You know what I’m saying? (2-28-06)

Data analysis showed frequent mention of rules that students feel are not necessary in school. Many participants believe teachers and school officials have rules and consequences that interfere with the learning environment in school. The students also think more time is spent on enforcing rules and providing consequences than is required for smooth running of the high school.

The rule participants say they have the most trouble accepting is students have to wear IDs. During observation in the classrooms, teachers were very strict about checking to see students had them on; this rule seems to be enforced most consistently.
and frequently. Field notes did show that teachers had different ways of handling this rule, as two checked for ID’s and then allowed students to go to their lockers to get them. Ricky (1-30-06) clarifies, “Some teachers make a big deal about it. They say you don’t have your ID on, you’re being marked absent. If I was in charge of it, I’d put a bar code on the back and have students swipe to get into class. So then they know if you’re there or not.” Jeremy (2-08-06) agrees and explains, “There are way more important things, and that’s their main focus. It’s dumb.”

Another one of the rules questioned is the dress code for boys. Jeremy (2-8-06) believes, “It’s not important for guys if they sag their pants or wear cut t-shirts. For girls yes, if they wear their skirts too low. They don’t need to be worrying about what kids is wearing.”

A few students took issue with punishing students for inappropriate language. When talking about unimportant rules, Jeremy (1-11-06) defends his position on swearing. “Uh, freedom of speech. Cursing, swearing. I think that one’s bull too, cause if a kid really need to get his point through, he should be able to say what he need to get his point through.” He later shared inappropriate language sometimes comes out inadvertently, saying, “It depends on the mood you’re in. You can’t help the mood you’re in” (2-8-06). Ricky agrees, “There are times it just slips out. If you don’t mean to say it, they should allow it” (1-30-06). During the site observation, Kyle’s teacher showed flexibility when she heard a student swear while working on an accounting program on the computer. She reframed by stating, “I just heard someone swear. It sounds like someone is frustrated and needs help,” and she walked over to provide assistance.
High school reports were analyzed to show incidents that led to discipline referrals. These episodes are reported in Table 9 for the student participants who finished the semester at the high school.

Table 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sam</th>
<th>Dominick</th>
<th>Jeremy</th>
<th>Mikey</th>
<th>Nick</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tr>
<td>Disrespect</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut class</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profanity</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dishonesty</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure to accept discipline</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unserved detention</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disruptive</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tardiness</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not wearing ID’s</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threats</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Document analysis showed most participant discipline referrals were for cutting class, failure to accept discipline (not serving detentions or corrective learning), disruption of the school (threatening or disrespectful), profanity, and ID violations. During the time the research project was conducted, students received between 2 and 21 discipline reports during the first semester of school. Also, during the time frame, two participants changed from the high school to a more restrictive placement at a separate self-contained building as a consequence for behavior.

Student participants felt that most rules at the high school were unnecessary and document analysis showed rules that were consistently broken. This fits conclusions
from previous research by Crowley (1999) whose participants felt teachers were too strict, and a study by Tulley and Chiu (1998) whose participants felt only rules addressing disruption, defiance and aggression should be necessary at school.

Classroom Preferences

Some classroom procedures are not school rules, but analysis of the data shows students would like more flexibility and understanding when setting these policies. Many students would like more of a choice in setting the seating plan in the classroom. Ricky (1-30-06) recommends, “If they like to be up front, sit up front, if you want to be in the back, be in the back. But if you’re talking to someone, the teacher could move you.” Sam (1-11-06) agrees, “Let them sit by whoever they want, just wait till the teacher’s done talking and they can do the work and talk.” A few students expressed anxiety about sitting in the front of the room. Ricky (1-30-06) states, “Some of us are better in front and some of us—like me—are better in the back. Like I can’t stand people behind me. So I’ll even be off to the side or in the back and then I can learn better.” Ali (9-6-05) agrees: “Like I got this thing, where I can’t stand no one behind me ‘cause it’s like I get that feeling, I don’t know how to explain it. I sit like in the front row in that class. So I’m real uncomfortable.”

Nick and Dominick (1-11-06) describe the difficulty they have staying in one seat for an entire period because of hyperactivity. Both wish teachers would incorporate more chances to physically move during the school day.

A few practices put into effect in classrooms for students with special needs were appreciated by the participants. Two students mentioned using headphones and music to help them concentrate by tuning out extraneous noise. Ricky (11-11-05),
Jeremy (11-10-05) and Kyle (10-17-05) believe they can work better when they listen to music wearing headphones. However, this privilege is just allowed in special education classes. Jeremy explains Ms. Quail (the teacher for students with special needs) allows it. “And she knows that listening to music helps you concentrate, you don’t even have to ask. And that’s helped me a lot on tests.” Kyle (10-17-05) likes the teacher who allows him to listen to music with headphones because, “I usually have them on because it helps me tune everybody out. It helps with my ADHD [Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder] because I can tune out things around me with music, and I work a whole lot better with music.”

Another indulgence allowed in the classroom for students with special needs was having food and drink in class. Field notes showed students indulging in their special classes, but not in the inclusion ones. Ricky (11-11-05) suggests, “Like she’ll [Ms. Quail] let you drink something in class, but if you make a mess, you’re done and she won’t let you drink in class anymore.” And Sam (11-10-05) also recommends, “Get rid of the no drinks in the classroom.”

What students articulate about classroom preferences supports special accommodations students with special needs may require to be successful in the classroom. Hyperactivity may cause students difficulty in sitting still or maintaining concentration, while seating arrangements may lead to anxiety in students having emotional disturbance. Hammel (2004) recommends teachers be flexible and modify classroom expectations so students find success, and IEP’s could address these specific concerns.
Positive Discipline Strategies

*Interaction Between Teacher and Students*

Students were asked to give suggestions for reinforcing appropriate behavior in the classroom. One theme that was frequently mentioned is teacher motivation by showing an interest and working with students to help them be successful. Jeremy (2-8-06) believes a good teacher pushes you to do well. “If a teacher doesn’t push you, no one else does. Special ed. teachers do this.” Sam (11-17-05) also shares that a teacher can be a stimulus, “Because for the past two years he’s been there when I needed him and he put me in these classes so I can do better at school. And he actually made me pass. He made me pass 9th and 10th grade.”

Again, research shows that a caring teacher can mean a difference for students in academic, social and disciplinary areas. This backs research by Glasser (1969) who believes discipline problems could be minimized with caring teachers. Also, Dreikurs and Cassel (1972) recommend positive modeling to be done by the teacher, as a good relationship between the student and the teacher heads off serious disturbances in the classroom.

*Rewards and Structure*

Participants were asked to suggest rewards or ways to structure classroom management so students could focus on learning. Some of the policies mentioned previously: (a) allowing students to choose their own seat, (b) allowing headphones during tests, and (c) allowing food and drinks in the classroom, could be utilized. Nick suggested:
Make school start later. Give everybody a pop of their choice because pop makes me focus more. My parents won’t let me have it because of the medicine I’m on because they say it’s a counter-reaction, which I don’t think so. It makes me focus more. (1-11-06)

Dominick (1-11-06) recommends the teacher, “Give them incentives like maybe no homework on certain days or something like that.” Nick (1-30-06) proposes “a reward day with a point system. Give points for wearing ID’s, appropriate language and doing your work and then have a Friday reward day.” According to the researcher’s field notes, the reward day Nick mentions is currently in place at his high school in the classroom for students with special needs, but students explain few rewards at the high school are given out by inclusion teachers. Mikey remembered and shared a previous teacher’s positive discipline practices:

Like my teacher in sixth grade, how she did it. If we were getting out of line how she’d get us back in line. If you guys got too rowdy, she’d say, ‘Take a five minute break,’ and we’d have the lights off for 5 minutes. And if you all is quiet the rest of the day, the next day she’d bring us a treat like pop and chips and sandwiches. (1-11-06)

Students surveyed liked the use of rewards in the classroom, but said most rewards occurred in classes for students with special needs. One way to reward students for their behavior in inclusion classes would be a system with rewards to be earned with a positive consequence given in the class for students with special needs. Friend and Bursuck (2002) recommend social reinforcers such as praise or a pat on the back as an easy, effective positive in inclusion classes.

Consequences

Students were asked to identify consequences given for breaking rules at school. From that list, students discussed the effectiveness of the punishments.
Researcher: What do you think of these discipline strategies: emergency removal, corrective learning, suspension, and expulsion?

Dominick: They’re nothing. They don’t do nothing. I got a coffee can filled with referrals, and so far I only served four.

Researcher: What are you referred for?


Researcher: So what do you think they should do?

Dominick: I have no clue. I don’t think anything would work on me.

Ricky believes teachers and administrators give too many consequences. Sometimes what looks like a problem, may not really be one. School personnel should wait to be sure there’s a problem before rushing in:

If a kid’s going to get into a fight, yeah, take him out of here. But if I’m sitting there going, you have no idea how much I’m restraining myself from knocking you on your ass, then no. Cause I’m restraining MYSELF…. Like if I’m already out of the chair and halfway over the table, then get me out of here before someone dies.” “Be patient. For example, if it sounds like we’re going to get into a fight, it might not mean that. Some of us are just talk, others aren’t. So it’s really a game of listening. So you don’t need to call all four administrators to hold me down and take me out. Because I may just be saying that to get them to back down. (1-30-06)

Nick (1-30-06) shares his concern about the inability he has to sit in Corrective Learning (in-school suspension) all day. “Sitting in CL, I could not do that. I cannot sit still. Whether I had permission or not—I would leave the school if they did that to me.”
Jeremy realizes placement in a class for students with special needs allows some modification of regular building procedures related to disciplinary incidents:

My mom want me in special ed. ‘cause she know I got a big, bad attitude. And I like ‘F’ this and ‘F’ that in this class, and they’ll know I’m mad. And if I’m in the regular class, I’ll probably be suspended and in special ed. I’d get a detention. I’d be in a lot more trouble in the regular class. (1-11-06)

High school discipline reports show disruptive (disrespectful or threatening) behavior incidents usually resulted in an out of school suspension. Breaking rules such as cutting classes, ID violation, and profanity earned a consequence of corrective learning (in school suspension) or Saturday school. More severe offenses such as drug use or assault resulted in more restrictive placement.

Participants believe consequences for inappropriate behavior at school do not help them change their behavior. This backs research by Tulley and Chiu (1998) who found removal punishments (suspension, isolation, detention) are ineffective in changing behavior, and that the best way to effect a change is in talking with students about the offense.

Strategies to Help Students When Having a “Bad Day”

Successful Interventions

In describing discipline plans, several students mentioned they had a Crisis Plan in place. As Sam (1-30-06) describes it, “It’s for when I refuse to do something or I don’t want to do it. The teacher either asks me to leave or I ask to leave until I get calmed down. Then I come back.” Ricky describes his problems controlling his behavior on “bad days”: 
Ricky: There are times that I’ve had bad days and I’ve said ‘F’ this. I’m not working. Screw you. I’m not doing it. And I say that before I think. And that’s my major problem because I do things before I think. So I just need to say bad day, I’m not doin’ it. Take it back.

Researcher: So the crisis plan helps you with that?

Ricky: When I need to get away from the problem. I can usually stay in the classroom unless someone is reminding me of it. (1-30-06)

When asking students what works successfully to calm them down when feeling volatile, Ricky (11-10-05) states, “If it was Ms. Quail [teacher of students with special needs], she would let me go in the back room or away from the rest of the class to do the assignment. Probably the regular ed. teachers would say, ‘try not to do anything to get in trouble’. That’s what I try to do anyways, but sometimes I just either have to blow up or get out.” Jeremy (11-10-05) believes what works best for him is to “talk about it. ‘Cause once you talk about it, it’s out. If you hold things in, it’s gonna stay in and it’s just gonna end up going to something you wish it wasn’t.” Dominick (11-14-05) suggests the teachers “joke around a little bit and get my mind off it.” Ali (11-10-05) asks the teachers to “send me home on emergency removal.” Tim (11-10-05) states, “They can tell when a kid’s having a bad day…. If I’m just sitting there staring off and not doing my work they could just leave me alone.” Nick (11-14-05) asks that the teacher “Take it easy on me and let me cool off for awhile.”

Table 10 shows the responses from participants listing positive interventions by teachers when students are having a bad day.
Table 10

What Teachers do to Help on a “Bad Day”

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<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Ricky: “Let me go in the back of the room to do the work. Say, ‘Try not to do anything to get in trouble.’”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Dominick: “Joke around with me and talk. Get my mind off it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Mikey: “I would ask Ms. Quail to talk during her support period.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Ali: “Send me home on emergency removal.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Tim: “If I’m just sitting there staring off and not doing my work, they could just leave me alone.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Nick: “She’d take it easy on me and let me cool off for awhile. Most teachers wouldn’t listen if you tried to talk to them about it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Sam: “They should talk to you about it, or let you sleep. Or say do the work for homework.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants in the study felt the best ways to help them when they were having a bad day was to either give them time alone to cool off or offer to talk to them about the problem causing the “bad day.” This is backed by Tulley and Chiu (1998) who suggest discussion between student and teacher about an offense is much more helpful and effective in changing behavior. Long’s (1990) “emotional first aid” supports talking to student about conflict as an opportunity to talk out frustrations. This is also a way of changing faulty thought processes advocated in cognitive therapy and rational emotive therapy (Beck, 1976, 1999; Burns, 1990; Ellis & Bernard, 1983).
Unsuccessful Interventions

Participants were asked to relate what interventions would make things worse for them when they were trying to hold their tempers. Ricky (11-10-05) believes, “The worst thing a teacher could do would be to say, ‘I don’t care. Do your work. Just sit there and take it.’” Jeremy (11-10-05) agrees it would make him angry if the teacher acted like he/she “could care less. Like, ‘Are you gonna do the work or not?’” and Nick (11-14-05) concurs: “They’d sit there and say, ‘Oh well, that’s too bad. You’re gonna have to do what the rest of the class does. I’m not treating you like a special person’ and stuff like that.”

Other students had different triggers which would cause them to become more upset on a bad day. Dominick mentions, (11-14-05) “Get on me for doing something. Give me a detention, something like that.” Mikey believes, (11-14-05) “Try to keep me to sit down. Cause I wouldn’t. I’d just walk out of school then.” Ali (11-10-05) explains the worst strategy for her would be, “Make me stay in school with the problem. It just never goes away.” Nick (1-30-06) tells, “I might talk about the problem later, but it will cause a meltdown to talk about it before I’m ready.”

Table 11 shows participants’ responses on teacher interventions that would make a “bad day” worse.
Table 11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jeremy</td>
<td>“Could care less. Like, ‘Are you gonna do the work or not?’”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ricky</td>
<td>“Say, ‘I don’t care. Do your work. Just sit there and take it.’”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominick</td>
<td>“Get on me for doing something. Give me a detention.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mikey</td>
<td>“Try to keep me to sit down. Cause I wouldn’t. I’d just walk out of school then.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ali</td>
<td>“The worst thing they could do is make me stay in school with the problem.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim</td>
<td>“They would ask me if I’m having a bad day.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nick</td>
<td>“They’d sit there and say, ‘Oh well, that’s too bad. You’re gonna have to do what the rest of the class does. I’m not treating you like a special person.’”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>“They would yell at me for not doing the work.”</td>
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</table>

Participant responses showed students want a teacher who is sympathetic and flexible when they are having a “bad day.” Some say they would not want to talk about the problem, but that may relate to the fact that they do not have a relationship in place with the teacher who wants to talk, or they may perceive that the teacher is the problem. This is an example of the importance of knowing each student individually, as some students feel talking to the teacher helps them while others feel it would make a “bad day” worse.
Talking to an Adult

The interviewer asked each participant, “If you had a problem and needed to talk to an adult, which adult would you talk to and why? Parent, teacher, counselor, relative?” Data analysis of field notes and interviews showed most participants would go to the two teachers of students with special needs (Mr. Goode and Ms. Quail) before anyone else.

Mikey: If I’m having a “bad day,” second period I go to Ms. Quail and talk to her and ask her if I can go to her 3rd period [her planning period.] That’s what I did 2 weeks ago when me and Ashley got together. We broke up because they told her that I was cheating on her. So we broke up for a day. And it twisted me around, and then I went and talked to Ms. Quail about it. She wrote a note for me to get out of class.

Researcher: How did you know she would do that? How did you ask her for help the first time?

Mikey: Well, the first day of school she took us outside and she wanted us to jump on vanilla envelopes. Like, she put them like three yardsticks away and wanted us to jump on ‘em like a river was between ‘em….

Researcher: Like they were rocks?

Mikey: Yeah, but we wouldn’t do it. Me and this other kid wouldn’t do it. And that’s when Ms. Quail and I got really close and started really having conversations and everything.

Researcher: You mean she talked to you about why you wouldn’t do it?
Mikey: Yeah, we started talking and then we just been talking ever since. And we just got closer and closer, and then that’s the only teacher I actually go to. (11-14-05)

Ali shares that the adult she would pick to confide in would be “Ms. Quail. Because she was there in a time of need, not matter what it was, anything I needed, she was right there, no hesitation….Yeah, not only in school, but outside of school too…. Also because she would sit down and listen and wouldn’t be offended by what I say” (11-14-05).

Jeremy (11-10-05) explains he would talk to: “Mr. Goode because he came like from the same environment I came around and he already knew how I could react toward things. And he wasn’t just an average old teacher. When we bump into each other at the mall, we’ll talk to each other for an hour straight. Ms. Quail, she’s more of a friend too. I don’t really call them teachers. They’re more my friends. I could actually call them for help or say let’s go do something. You know. Those probably be my favorite teachers because they help, not just sit down and listen.” Sam (1-11-06) also chooses Mr. Goode “because me and him are real close. Really cool.” Nick (1-11-06) explains that he would probably ask to talk to the counselor. “I’m not talking to my parents ‘cause they’ll just tell me what not to do. If enough time has gone by that you can talk about a problem without a meltdown, it helps to talk about it…. [I might also talk to] the teacher—but if it’s a teacher I don’t like I won’t want to talk to them.”

It was apparent from field notes and data analysis that participants in this study rely on and relate to the teachers of students with special needs. These teachers know each student well and communicate a caring and helpfulness to each child, both in
areas of academics and personal life. Student responses again communicate the importance of having a relationship, so that during a crisis, a foundation of trust is already in place (Mendes, 2003; Pigford, 2000; Gootman & DeClaire, 2001; Rogers & Renard, 1999). It also links back to the social learning theory of Bandura (1973) in helping students learn new ways of interacting with others, and cognitive (Beck, 1976, 1999; Burns, 1990) and rational emotive therapies (Ellis & Bernard, 1983) for helping change the thought processes which determine the emotional responses of anger and aggression. It is a way of teaching students social skills as well as allowing them the opportunity to vent.

**Summary for Research Question #3**

Data analysis of the third research question, “According to the student with emotional disturbance, what specific discipline/classroom management practices aid in keeping the student focused on learning?” indicated broad categories on Rules, Positive Discipline Strategies, Consequences, and Interventions to Help Students when Having a “Bad Day.” Study of the interview transcripts and field notes showed students felt there were too many unnecessary rules and most positive discipline strategies were in place only in the classrooms for students with special needs rather than in inclusion classes. Also, participants did not feel consequences the school enacted had much effect on changing inappropriate behaviors. Students shared successful and unsuccessful interventions which worked personally when students were having a “bad day.” Again, great disparity was found among individual students concerning what was best for them in stressful, volatile situations. Most students expressed closeness to
the two teachers of students with special needs, and they gave reasons why they would confide their problems in them.

Semester Grades in Inclusion Class

It is important to determine the academic success of participants in their inclusion classes. If a student earns a passing grade, it helps to justify the inclusion of the child with ED in the regular classroom. If the student is not successful in the inclusion class, the IEP team needs to evaluate to determine the reason for the failure. Perhaps, with more support, a student could do well in the inclusion class. Or it may be determined that placement in the classroom for children with special needs would have been a better learning environment with more chance of student success.

Semester grades are shown in Table 12.

Table 12

Semester Grades in Inclusion Class

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Dominick</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Nick</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Jeremy</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Ricky</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Mikey</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Sam</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Ali</td>
<td>Transferred before the end of the semester to a more restrictive placement off-site due to difficulties controlling behavior.</td>
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</table>

(table continues)
Data analysis of the grades showed four of the nine student participants passed their inclusion class with grades of B, C, or D. Two students failed their classes, two students were sent from the school due to behavior problems, and one student did not complete the semester at the site. This shows that of the eight students still in the district at semester time, 50% of the participants got credit for the inclusion classes taken, and 50% were unsuccessful and did not get credit for the class because they earned a failing grade.

Unfortunately, these grades show a low rate of academic success for students in inclusion classes. When students do not earn credit for their inclusion class, they may fail the school year or be forced to attend summer school to ensure passing to the next grade.

Case Studies

Two student participants were chosen for an in-depth profile in this research study, although all the students in this study were interesting and showed unique personalities. Sam was a talkative, happy participant, who was taken out of corrective learning many times for the interviewing sessions. He was chosen because his attitude toward what makes a “good teacher” was so different from the other participants and from what the researcher would have expected. Sam frequently mentioned throughout
the semester the teacher that screamed at him helped him pass his classes. He also asked that teachers not get mad, and take it easy on him. When questioned about the disparity in these two ideas, he said it depended which teacher applied the approach that worked best with him.

Jeremy was extremely positive about his inclusion teacher and praised everything about her—her laugh, her personal interest in him, the method she had of letting students partner with each other, and her presentation of the lessons. Unfortunately, Jeremy was expelled from her class a few weeks before the semester ended which resulted in an F for the semester grade. He told the researcher he would not pass the year without taking summer classes. He doubted he would go to summer school because he did not care if he graduated or not. Jeremy was chosen for a case study to show that although he highly valued the inclusion teacher’s personality and methods, he was unsuccessful in the class.

Case Study #1: Sam

Sam is a 16-year-old student in 11th grade. He has never been retained in school and when asked if he likes school, he replied, “Yes, for some odd reason this year I like school. Maybe because I hate staying home” (1-11-06). He started taking special education classes in ninth grade, but prefers general education classes to special education classes because he believes there is a stigma about being in special education. “People look at you weird when you go into those classes” (1-11-06). He claims his parents don’t care if he takes classes with the general education teacher or the special education teacher as long as he does well. The subject he likes the most in school is government, and he dislikes math, science, and English. Sam explained he
does not like to read because sometimes it is hard for him, although he does read the newspaper at home. Sam completes homework at school because he receives help from his special education teachers, and he works at night and doesn’t have time to complete assignments. He shared that his father owns a store, and he works there every other day except for Thursdays and Fridays.

When asked about discipline at school, Sam explained if he was the teacher, he would have no rules. He strongly believes cell phones and drinks should be allowed in the classroom and students should be able to choose their own seats. He says his parents scream at him and ground him as their form of discipline, and he thinks that not letting him go out is the most effective punishment to attempt to change his behavior. He has been suspended and had corrective learning assignments at school as consequences for inappropriate behavior which he feels are not effective. Sam stated that he has had “30 days in corrective learning this year because of his ‘temper problem,’” but now he is on a Crisis Plan to help him in difficult situations. He described the Crisis Plan as preparation “for when I refuse to do something or I don’t want to do it. The teacher either asks me to leave or I ask to leave until I get calmed down. I go talk to the counselor or Mr. Goode [the special education teacher.] Then I come back” (1-30-06). Sam explained he has not used the Crisis Plan since it was put into effect because he “hasn’t gotten mad at all.” He does believe when his parents come to school to meet with teachers or principals about his behavior, he then tries harder to change activities that cause him to earn a discipline referral. The teacher for students with special needs, Ms. Quail, explained to the researcher that Sam told her he was trying to set a record at the high school for the most discipline referrals. He
stopped when he was told he would be transferred to another in-district placement outside of the high school (for students who need a more restrictive setting).

According to school discipline records, Sam received 21 discipline reports the first semester of the 2005-2006 school year, with most frequent offenses for disrespect, disruption of school, and cutting classes.

For the scheduled classroom observation, the teacher allowed me to pull Sam out of corrective learning to attend class. Sam seemed very cheerful in the corrective learning room and was also happy to leave with me to attend his inclusion class. He smiled and greeted many peers on his walk with me to the classroom and on his walk back to corrective learning. Sam (10-11-05) shared he is very motivated to do well in the inclusion class because of the teacher. “If you’re nice to him, he’ll be nice to you. Or if you’re passing your classes … or trying hard. But if you’re not trying, he’s gonna be mean. He keeps screaming and screaming and he won’t stop screaming till you pass…. He yells to do your homework and he yells at you to do good in school. It works with me.” Sam explained he believes the teacher is a “supporter” cause he motivates me to do good in school.” Although the first time the teacher “screamed at me I got pissed off and I didn’t want to do nothing … but then I started working to shut his mouth.”

If he had a problem and needed to talk to an adult, Sam would talk to his special education teacher, Mr. Goode, rather than a counselor, his parents or another relative. He trusts Mr. Goode, who he describes as “laid back” and thus the best person to talk with about his difficulties. He believes last year he was treated unfairly by a teacher who was racist. “If me or Ben asked him to get a drink of water, he wouldn’t
let us. But like Brian, a White kid, could go. I’m not going racist or anything, but we did our work every day, and he wouldn’t let us go” (1-11-06).

When asked to give advice to teachers to help them be successful in working with him, Sam listed three strategies: “Take it easy on me. Explain a couple of times what they mean when giving directions. Don’t get mad.” He also gave suggestions for teachers in working with any special education student: “Be nice. Take time to help students. Show respect. Don’t have an attitude” (R 1-30-06).

When asked about his interests, Sam stated that he likes to “hang out” or work out. He also enjoys playing basketball, baseball, or football outside of school. He related he is not a “computer freak,” but he will talk to people on-line some nights when he’s really bored at home. His goal in life is to be a police officer, and he hopes that school will assist him in reaching that goal by helping provide a scholarship to college.

One of the documents Sam shared with me was a mission statement written in his inclusion class:

I feel that to succeed in life it is all your choice. I will not lie to my parents, listen to what they have to say to me, and respect them. I will try to get good grades and give all the teachers respect to them because they deserve it. I will put time and effort into my schoolwork. I will choose the right friends in life because you want friends that will respect you for who you are. I will manage my time and effort to do well in school. I will always keep my passions in mind. They are a big part of my life. (10-17-05)

*Case Study #2: Jeremy*

Jeremy is 16 years old and in 11th grade. He has never been retained in school, but he dislikes school. “Most of the time it just gets to be annoying. I don’t think we should have to wake up so early. First period is probably people’s weakest period
because they be too tired. Plus it’s too stressful… It’s like you have to do this cause if you don’t, I don’t know what I’m gonna do with my future. Yeah, the grades by themselves are just stressful” (1-11-06). He started in classes for students with special needs in ninth grade, and he prefers taking coursework in the special education classes because he gets more help there. He says his mom is happy he is in special education classes because he “has a bad attitude” and he would be in more trouble, especially for his language, if he was not in special education classes.

Jeremy picked lunch as his favorite subject because he says you “learn more there.” He especially dislikes government, but says the other classes he likes or dislikes depending on the teachers. He says he doesn’t like reading in school, but if you can pick your own reading material he sometimes can “get into it.” He tries to get homework done at school, but if he has any to take home, he does it on his own or sometimes his brother helps him.

Jeremy relates the style of discipline his mom uses at home with him is “War, ‘cause my mom do not play games.” When asked if that works with him, he said it does sometimes. “You know what I’m saying, when I’m in the right mood. But when I’m in my furious, pissed-off mood, there’s not really nothing that nobody could tell me” (1-11-06). He thinks the only rules important in school should be no drugs and no fighting. He believes the dress code is not important and that there should be freedom of speech because “cursing is OK to get your point through” (1-12-06). Jeremy explains although he was quiet in class, he was treated unfairly at his middle school. He kept getting in trouble because teachers showed favoritism to students. Jeremy shared that has been suspended, expelled and placed in corrective learning but these
strategies are ineffective in stopping unacceptable behavior; he says having someone talk to him about his behavior, such as the counselor or his mother, would be more effective. School discipline reports show he has had 10 offenses the first semester of the 2005-2006 school year, mostly for profanity and disruption of school.

Jeremy believes there are too many distractions in the classroom that interfere with his learning. He says there should be separate classes for girls and less posters on the wall. Having students sitting at separate desks rather than all at one big table would also help him pay attention and focus on the teacher.

If Jeremy was having a problem and needed an adult to talk to, he explains he would either talk to his uncle or Mr. Goode (teacher of students with special needs). He clarifies that his uncle “is understanding about fighting and anger,” and Mr. Goode used to teach in inner city schools so he “knows about guys like me” (1-12-06). He said Ms. Quail (teacher of students with special needs) is also more of a friend too. He said those are his favorite teachers because “they help, not just sit down and listen” (11-10-05).

Jeremy believes teachers should push you to do well. If he had one piece of advice for teachers to help them be successful in working with him it would be: “Treat me like everybody else.” One piece of advice for teachers working with students in classes for students with special needs would be: “Don’t be so strict” (2-9-06).

His interest in life is to “make beats,” which he explains is music. Jeremy says right now he and his brother make CD’s, and his goal in life is to be a producer of rap music. He stresses if music falls through he doesn’t know what he will do because that’s all he knows how to do, “make beats.” When asked if school will help him reach
that goal, Jeremy explained that right now he doesn’t know if he will graduate or not. On the day of the third interview he revealed that he had been kicked out of his inclusion class with only three weeks left in the semester which meant he failed the class. The teacher said he was “picking on kids…. Making fun of the students” (1-11-06). When asked if he would be taking the class over again, Jeremy said, “I really don’t care if I graduate or not. I wanted to graduate in 9th and 10th grade, but I don’t care now. I’m gonna be a producer, like I said. I don’t need it.” He explained that he might have to take it again to get his diploma and that he needed the credit to pass 11th grade. “That’s the only thing that’s messing me up. I would have to go to summer school just to pass to 12th grade. Right now, I don’t know if I’ll stay in school. I won’t graduate unless I go to summer school, and I won’t do that” (1-11-06).

In early interviews, while discussing the inclusion class, Jeremy was very complimentary about the inclusion teacher. He said she “presents herself more as a friend than a teacher and that’s real cool. I like that. And just how she presents herself and how, you know, she gives the assignments is just real good” (10-11-05). He likes the personal touch from the teacher and appreciates her allowing students to talk and pair with another student while working in her class. “Talking in class helps you so you don’t concentrate too hard, and it lets your creativity come out” (11-10-05). He likes the teacher’s approachability and personal interest in him. Jeremy believes she was mistaken in expelling him from class because he insists he was not misbehaving. He received an F as a final grade in the class because he did not complete the semester.
Summary

Three research questions were posed to students who are determined emotionally disturbed and through structured, semi-structured, free list, and pile search interviewing techniques. Participants gave opinions about educational practices at the high school. They considered positive and negative strategies of a teacher’s teaching style, explored how the classroom environment could be structured to best help the students learn, and described specific discipline/classroom management practices to aid students so they could focus on learning. Participants ranked components of each category to show which were most important to them personally. Although there was some agreement between individuals, there was no one obvious right component that worked best for all the students in the varying circumstances. The case studies point out the unique characteristics of two participants and reinforce the premise that education for students with special needs is based on individualization as the key to success.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

Researcher: Do you like school?

Nick: No. ‘Cause it’s boring, and I can’t sit still, and I’m always getting in trouble. (1-11-06)

As inclusion became an accepted school practice, educational personnel identified practices for students with special needs in general classrooms. This large body of research indicates strategies that allow educators to modify and accommodate curriculum (Rainforth, 1992; Switlick, 1997; Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1998) as well as develop behavior management approaches for students with special needs (Bandura, 1973; 1997; Beck, 1999; Downing, 2002; Goleman, 1995; Nagel, 1991). However, although research is extensive, most studies asked administrators, teachers and parents to determine approaches for successful inclusive practices in education. Very few research projects were conducted on student perceptions of best practices in teacher’s teaching style, structuring the classroom environment and discipline practices that help students learn in the general education classroom.

Greco’s (1993) and Garlick’s (1990) studies focused on ideal teacher behaviors as perceived by students who are classified as emotionally disturbed. The top four
characteristics determined by participant rankings in both studies showed students want teachers who are “nice, friendly, patient, and caring.” Other characteristics students found important in a teacher’s teaching style include funny, easy going, caring, fair, and friendly. They also valued the teacher who was willing to listen to students and discuss their problems while being respectful. Although both studies focused on student perceptions of admirable teacher traits, students in Garlick’s (1990) study also shared some structures in the classroom environment that helped the focus remain on learning. Both general education students and students with ED liked a teacher who uses a “variety of methods, gives clear explanations and feedback, and knows the subject matter” (p. 86). Also, SED students asked for “less teacher direction, more control over classroom structure, more opportunity to disagree and/or speak out, and preferred the ideal teacher to sometimes act more like a friend” (p. 85-86).

Habel (1999), in his work with students with behavior disorders, analyzed the Native American tradition of four “spirits” to look at how students experienced school. In talking to students with ED, he found they feel rejected by teachers so teachers need to overcome distrust by giving students respect and being helpful. He recommends giving students options to help increase their motivation and develop internal locus of control. As most students with ED experience difficulty in academic areas, Habel recommends make learning fun and hands on, addressing different learning styles, and helping students with homework.

Another researcher, Jahnukainen (2000) interviewed former students in ED classes in Finland. He discovered that students believed special education teachers and small teaching groups were the most positive aspects of their high school years. This is
because students felt placement in a classroom for students with special needs helped their school achievement to improve, and because they received help in managing behavior through fair discipline strategies.

In her work with adolescent aggressive students with ED, Crowley (1993) found that students perceive good teachers as ones who engage in student-teacher communication in a personal way, with humor, and clear expectations. Students also find teacher flexibility in both academic and disciplinary areas desirable. They want teachers to assist with homework and allow extra credit or retakes of tests so students can be successful. Students also prefer that teachers be tolerant and give students extra chances. In addition, Crowley’s student participants felt teachers overused discipline and/or punishments and had negative regard for students with ED. Students perceived teachers’ rigidity and overuse of discipline as unhelpful.

These current studies started identifying teacher characteristics and classroom procedures that students with ED found positive in the learning environment. The purpose of this study was to extend the previous studies by identifying specific strategies and interactions as ways of illustrating ideal teaching characteristics such as naming teaching methods, noting acceptable discipline strategies, and identifying helpful behaviors to students. Specific approaches to use when a student with ED was having a “bad day” were also detailed. This six month study, conducted at a large public high school in the Northeast, included nine participants. These students were identified as emotionally disturbed, with documented aggression occurring at school within the last year, between the ages of 14-18, who were currently enrolled in and attending at least one inclusion class.
The following research questions guided this study regarding educational programming:

1. According to students who are identified as having emotional disturbance, what components of a teacher’s teaching style are considered positive and negative strategies in working with students with severe emotional disturbance?

2. According to students with ED, how can the classroom environment be structured to best help the student learn?

3. According to the student with ED, what specific discipline/classroom management practices aid in keeping the student focused on learning?

Data included one participant observation in an inclusion classroom and 3 to 5 interview sessions with each participant. These interview sessions included structured, semi-structured, and free list and pile sort formats. Researcher field notes included descriptive comments, analytic comments, and reflective observations to aid in both detailed record-keeping, triangulating data, and reducing researcher bias. Educational documents were obtained from school personnel and students including class syllabi, study guides, tests, worksheets, discipline reports and grade cards. Using multiple approaches aided in the triangulation process, and the case was strengthened through data from nine participants and running a course of six months.

Qualitative case study was chosen as the research framework because it allows access to the human voice. The inquiry takes place within a real-life context using multiple sources of evidence and techniques (Yin, 1984.) The researcher recorded a thick, detailed description which allows readers a look at an individual’s perceptions, beliefs, and experiences in life. This is especially fitting with this population of
participants, as educators of exceptional students honor individualization in teaching which is best studied through this qualitative method (Crowley, 1994, 1995.)

Data analysis was an on-going process throughout the research study. The research questions guided thinking about each piece of new data. Findings were grouped into categories which were cross-checked and revised frequently as new findings led to new category groupings. Themes which did not fit with previous groupings led to reformulation with each category broken into subcategories or themes for further organization. Results of data analysis were compared against existing theories and current research to view correlation with the research questions. Opportunities to triangulate data strengthened research findings and conclusions.

This chapter will give conclusions regarding data analysis of each of the three research questions, their broad categories, and subcategory themes. The chapter will then suggest implications of those conclusions as a means to give voice to the population of students with emotional disturbance, and as a link for teachers and educators of this population of students with special needs.

Conclusions

Research questions sought to determine optimal conditions for the adolescent student with emotional disturbance and aggressive behavior in the inclusive educational setting. Three questions guided the study to cover characteristics students deemed favorable concerning the teacher’s teaching style, structuring the classroom environment, and classroom management practices.
Components of a Teacher’s Teaching Style

Research has identified characteristics students with emotional disturbance find desirable in a teacher’s teaching style. Garlick (1990), and Greco (1993) asked students with emotional disturbance to identify characteristics of the ideal teacher, and the top four characteristics were the same—nice, friendly, patient, caring. Findings of research by Crowley (1993) and Jaknukainen (2000) also found that students with ED came up with similar lists of favorable teacher traits.

Data analysis of this study corroborates findings of previous studies, as three broad categories were indicated that upheld those results. This study though, asked students to give specific examples to illustrate words like “nice,” “friendly,” etc., for concrete models.

Teacher’s Relationship and Interactions with Students

Data analysis shows the characteristic of the teacher’s teaching style that participants consistently desire is that the teacher is not “stuck-up.” Stuck-up is described in different ways by the students. Students describe the teacher who is too much of a perfectionist, too strict or bossy, and gives too much work as an educator who is stuck-up. Students want a teacher who is accessible and approachable so students can ask for help without fear of reprisal. The teacher should work with each student in a friendly way, showing interest in students as people. Participants like instructors who ask about their week-end and show they care about their students outside of school. Mendes (2003) believes that empathy is built by knowing students’ interests and concerns because rapport develops when a teacher takes the time to
personally know students. Participants liked when teachers greet them by name, with a smile, a “hi,” and a question about their day.

This study supports other studies in describing the importance of developing teacher-student relationships. Pigford (2000) suggests greeting students at the door and saying something personal to each, and Gootman and DeClaire (2001) recommend making a bid to a student—either verbally or non-verbally to create a relationship. As the bond between teacher and student is strengthened, a relationship account is available to the teacher that allows drawing from the account to help smooth potential problems and facilitate discussion between the student and teacher. It allows teachers an edge in helping a child when he is in the grip of unrealistic anger and blurred thinking described by Beck (1976, 1999) and Burns (1990), because the student may more easily talk to an adult when he has a preexisting relationship with the teacher. Also, developing a relationship between teachers and students may increase students’ attention to teachers’ behavior, allowing them to learn appropriate non-aggressive ways of interaction in support of Bandura’s (1973) social learning theory.

This research study shows student participants value a teacher who is encouraging and supportive to students. Rogers and Renard (1999), in discussing strategies in relationship-driven teaching, confirm students want a teacher who cares about them personally and educationally. Students want to feel valued and cared about as well as included as part of the group in the classroom. However, adolescents in this research study vary in their views of how a teacher communicates encouragement and support. One student believes a teacher should yell at a student to motivate him to finish his work. Ultimately then, the work gets done and the student passes the course.
The student then feels the teacher communicates caring by pushing students to perform to their best, which may be the way other significant adults in this student’s life show their encouragement and support. Another student asks that the teacher encourage by praising or suggesting the student try harder. This provides further support of Sutherland’s (2000) research that noted that teacher praise has positive effects on both academic and behavioral outcomes in students with ED, even though teachers praised students for compliance only 2% of the time that they were on task. Other participants relate details of additional ways teachers can guide them to be successful. One way is to help with homework or by re-explaining concepts that may be difficult to comprehend. Analysis of the data shows these adolescents hate to be put down in class and ask for privacy about their grades. Most ask for respect from teachers, although one student said he doesn’t want respect, but a teacher who jokes around.

Another example of support is that the teachers respect the students by believing what they are told. If a student promises to do the work, the teacher should believe him; if the student tells the teacher he wasn’t smoking in the restroom, the teacher should not doubt his word.

**Characteristics of Teachers**

Some personal attributes in teachers were highly desired by participants. Data analysis indicated these adolescents ask teachers to be patient because they might “mess up—in behavior, grades on the test, anything” (Nick, 1-11-06). Participants ask teachers to show patience when helping students with coursework and in repeating directions when a first explanation is not understood. They ask that teachers give you a break on late work if someone was sick or the computer broke down.
Data analysis shows that humor is important to these adolescents, with eight of the nine participants mentioning it. Students appreciate a teacher with a good sense of humor who makes others laugh, someone who “goofs-off” with students. Adolescents especially like teachers who joke and tease and allow a little bit of leeway and “not flip out if you say one little word.” This reinforces previous research that shows not only do students appreciate humor, there are many benefits of humor in the classroom. Mitchell and McNally (2004) say a sense of humor serves students well in life as it can contribute to the learning environment by increasing attention and motivation. Another benefit is encouraging students to take risks because humor makes mistakes more acceptable in the classroom. Humor also is beneficial in keeping pupils alive and waiting to see what comes next (Sanchez, 1998). It links students to the teacher through enjoyment. Humor may be especially important with students with ED, as humor is a great stress reliever which can be used to reduce anger and aggression (Forbes, 1997; Mitchell & McNally, 2004.)

Negative Practices

Reissman’s (1999) research on emotional intelligence found that using empathy to look at the situation from the student’s perspective allows teachers the chance to clear misinformation. All of the participants in this study feel they were treated unfairly by teachers. Each student felt they were targeted for misbehaviors where other students were allowed to do things, but they were punished for the same behavior. Others felt there were special circumstances (divorce, illness in the family) where teachers should have been more flexible and lenient, but because teachers were rigid, an
explosion occurred. Dominick feels that because he is labeled as having behavior problems he receives undeserved consequences for his behavior.

Students mention negative, punitive qualities in teachers—strictness, yelling, acting mean, giving too many negative consequences for minor misbehavior—that backfire because it causes students to get angry and have a meltdown. Ali, the sole female participant in this study, mentioned a general education teacher who would not help her in class. She was sent out of the inclusion classroom to the teacher for students with special needs for help on tests and assignments. Ali felt the teacher should know that because she is in a special education class, she should be offered extra help. This supports Greco’s (1993) study in gender expectation which discovered females want teachers to be more attending and show a greater interest in them.

Structuring the Classroom Environment for Learning

When a teacher’s teaching style is positive and welcoming to students, it helps to make adolescents feel accepted and comfortable in the classroom. Relationship-driven teaching asserts when psychological needs of students are met, meaningful work allows active engagement in the learning experience (Rogers & Renard, 1999). If a student is excited about learning rather than bored with meaningless lecturing, motivation is high to attend to the teacher and become active in the educational experience (Santa, 1998). Results of this study provide further support of these findings.

Work Helpful to Students

Data analysis found collaboration was highly motivating and greatly prized by students as students ranked working with peers as the most helpful strategy the teacher
could structure into the classroom environment. Students believed having a partner helped them because they could collaborate with the partner to get the right answer. They liked having the help and the feeling of satisfaction by helping a peer when they knew the correct response. Also, if students did not understand the directions or the instructional concept, they believed a partner could explain it to them in a way they could understand.

Students also mentioned cooperatively working in a group as a beneficial way to understand and correctly demonstrate concepts. However, data analysis showed some adolescents are anxious about the members of the group, showing concern about the amount of members, and how well the members know each other. Group work is valuable as a way for a student to earn a good grade, as it is done in class and students share in the effort of the project.

A substantive body of research has documented the positive benefits, both academically and for social modeling, of allowing students to work with peers. The REI (Regular Education Initiative) in the 1980’s recommended cooperative learning involving heterogeneous learning teams to transform general education classes into more academically and socially responsive settings for students with disabilities (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994). This is also consistent with a study by King-Sears (1997) advocating cooperative learning as the best academic practice for inclusive classrooms. Cooperative learning is seen as a way to use peer tutoring through the entire class to help in decoding instruction, allowing appropriate help from peer members, and also impacting successful completion of academic tasks.
Data analysis showed participants need help from teachers in preparing for exams. Most students conveyed they did not study at home for tests, and any time spent reviewing was done at school. Thus, students asked for study guides, telling what pages to study, and what material to learn. They also asked that teachers provide direct help in reviewing for the test, suggesting they answer questions in class, and allow students to study together in groups or offer study sessions after school to help students.

A classroom structure data analysis showed as counterproductive is the assigning of homework, as data analysis indicated that most participants will not complete homework outside of school. Reasons for this include a lack of assistance at home, working a job after school, the difficulty of concentrating due to attention deficit, and the desire to hang out with friends rather than complete school tasks. These adolescents ask to have help with homework during the school day, either during time in the inclusion class or having help in the supportive classroom for students with special needs.

**Interesting Work**

Students described most teaching methods currently practiced in their inclusion classrooms as lecturing, note-taking, and assigning book readings. Data analysis showed participants appreciated interesting work which involved varied approaches to learning. Many participants had difficulty with attention deficits, therefore they asked for more hands-on work. The classes where students were actively involved were the most enjoyable and usually required little work outside of the classroom. These findings provide support for the principles of relationship-driven teaching (Rogers &
Renard, 1999) which advocate challenging and active learning activities for students, with teachers trying varying approaches to teaching and re-teaching until students are successful at learning the material. Findings also support Prater’s (2003) research on passive learners who become involved when material is engaging and active so students do most of the work.

Data indicated a wide range of learning styles for the student participants, which a varied approach in methods would address. Some participants mentioned that the computer was a helpful tool because it helped students become organized and maintain it. Use of computers also allowed students to retrieve information at will, which was a boon to those adolescents who were disorganized. However, some participants did not feel proficient on computers, so these learners felt intimidated by computer work. Many students mentioned movies and videos in class as an effective way for teachers to hold their attention.

Making the lesson fun and engaging was mentioned frequently by participants. Findings of this study indicated students desire lessons making enjoyable projects, playing games to help them study for tests, even having the teacher joke or play “crazy music” as a way to make the day more interesting than taking boring notes and reading textbooks.

Meaningful Work

Analysis of the data shows students believe schoolwork should be personally relevant. However, these learners maintain it is an infrequent occurrence in current classes. Students mention certain subjects with personal relevance such as science and art, but cannot connect with other inclusion teachers’ attempts to make their inclusion
classes more personally relevant to students’ lives. Participants relate mutually if the teacher shows enthusiasm for the subject, it makes the subject matter more interesting for the students. Even if it is not personally relevant to them, the fact that the material is attractive to the instructor makes it more motivating to these adolescents. This supports the findings of Rogers and Renard (1999) who believe work should be valuable so students fully engage and produce quality products. They believe valuable work must fill a need, solve a problem or be enjoyable to be motivating for students to put forth their best effort.

**Discipline/Classroom Management Practices**

Glasser (1969) believes discipline problems could be minimized with caring teachers who use interesting curriculum. Research studies advocate having a structured, positive classroom environment in place (Bandura, 1973; Nagel, 1981). In describing best practices for inclusive classrooms, King-Sears (1997) recommends a proactive approach to behavior management, believing the most effective plans are those that prevent problems from occurring. Document analysis in this research project shows a general behavior management plan of rules and consequences is in effect for adolescents at the high school. Only teachers of students of special needs have a structure in place to reward students for proper behavior (homework completion, following rules, etc.) in the special education classrooms.

**Rules**

Analysis of the data shows the desire to have less strict teachers was a recurrent theme shared by all participants. All students related tales of punitive or unfair teachers and how they interfered with the learning environment.
Although students agree some rules are necessary such as no fighting and no drugs, data analysis confirms many rules in school are deemed unnecessary by participants. Teachers spend classroom time enforcing these superfluous rules and providing consequences when broken, which takes away from time that should be spent teaching curriculum. This compares with the findings of Crowley (1999) whose research participants also believed inclusion teachers were too strict, and the study by Tulley and Chiu (1998) whose student participants believed only three types of misbehavior should be addressed by teachers: disruption, defiance, and aggression.

Wearing an ID badge is one of the rules strictly enforced at the high school of this research study. During participant observations, teachers frequently asked students to see their IDs and sent students to their lockers to get them when they were not wearing them. Another regulation, student dress code, is questioned by research participants who wonder why boys cannot sag their pants or wear cut t-shirts. Data analysis also shows students also take issue with the rule of punishing students for inappropriate language. Two reasons why students feel inappropriate language should be overlooked are freedom of speech as well as speaking in the heat of the moment to get one’s point across.

Concerning classroom policies, students would like a choice of where to sit in class. Two of the participants mentioned their unease with sitting in the front of the room with students behind them. Some expressed concern about having to sit still for a 50 minute period and shared the difficulty of accomplishing this with hyperactivity.

Several of the students asked for practices in the inclusion classroom that are only allowed in the classes for students with special needs. A few of the participants
shared how helpful it was to wear headphones and play music when taking a test as it enhanced their concentration and helped them score higher. Another indulgence requested was eating and drinking in the classroom, which they recommended be allowed unless it was abused. These findings compare with current research (Hammel, 2004) recommending that the inclusion teacher be flexible and modify classroom expectations when necessary so that all students find success in the classroom.

Positive Discipline Strategies

Students in this study explored positive discipline strategies and gave suggestions for reinforcing behavior in the classroom. One example of a reinforcer is the teacher, as the teacher can motivate by showing interest and working with these adolescents to help them be successful. Some ask teachers to push them to do their best because, “If a teacher doesn’t push you, no one else does” (Jeremy, 2-18-06).

Possible rewards for these students could be policies mentioned previously that are coveted by students: allowing headphones during tests, allowing a choice of seat assignment, and allowing food and drinks in the classroom. Some suggest a later start to the school day (which is a school-wide privilege that can be earned with exceptional grades), bringing treats like pop and food for good behavior, or incentives like a “no homework pass.”

Participants also mentioned the motivation of earning points for a reward day which is procedure in the classrooms for students with special needs. If students have IDs, use appropriate language, and complete their assigned work, they have rewards on Friday such as movies and food. Students explain inclusion teachers do not give
rewards (they consider a good grade enough reward for hard work), they just give consequences for inappropriate behavior. Although tangible reinforcers may not be used by general education high school teachers, Friend and Bursuck (2002) suggest social reinforcers, such as praise or a pat on the back, and also activity reinforcers, such as doing schoolwork on the computer or playing a classroom game to review for the test, are effective ways for an inclusion teacher to reward appropriate behaviors.

Consequences

When asked about school consequences that worked to change inappropriate behavior, students were stumped. Most said there were no consequences that helped change behavior, although many enjoyed their corrective learning time because they could get schoolwork done there. Some participants said they would refuse consequences such as corrective learning because they could not sit still in a room all day without being allowed to move around. Others claim teachers rush in too quickly to avert problems, when students may merely be asserting their inalienable rights with no intention of becoming physically aggressive.

Placement in a class for students with special needs does allow participants some modification in consequences for disciplinary incidents. Because of the IEP, these adolescents may receive a detention rather than suspension for a rule infraction. Also, some students have accumulated a large amount of disciplinary referrals without suffering serious consequences that may be building policy for students not on an IEP.

Discipline reports from data collection showed that the six student participants still in the study at the end of the first semester received between 4-21 disciplinary interventions that school year, two students changed school placement to a more
restrictive setting due to behavior before the end of the semester, and one student moved out of district. Tulley and Chiu (1998) felt “removal punishment” which included detention, suspension and isolation was an ineffective strategy for changing behavior, but believed discussion between the student and teacher about the offense was much more effective in effecting a change in behavior.

Strategies to Help Students Having a “Bad Day”

Since all participants had documented aggression at school within the last year, this study sought to find strategies to help these adolescents calm down and regain control when they are feeling volatile. Data analysis indicated several students mentioned they had a Crisis Plan, although when asked, other students said they did not have a Crisis Plan and wished they had one. The Crisis Plan affords adolescents the opportunity to leave a bad situation until they can regain control. They leave the environment and seek out an adult on their plan, a counselor or teacher of students with special needs, for help in defusing the situation. These adults allow these adolescents to vent and calm down enough so they can return to class calmly. The Crisis Plan approach shares a well-documented relationship with two current studies: Long’s (1990) “emotional first aid” strategy of talking to a student during a crisis situation to defuse frustration, and “life space intervention” which uses conflict as an opportunity for intervention by allowing students to talk out frustrations with a teacher (Feeser & Long, 1998). The Crisis Plan also shares similar strategies with Bandura’s (1973) plan for helping students develop new ways of relating to others, and also research on changing faulty thought processes which lead to emotional upsets (Beck, 1976, 1999; Burns, 1990; Ellis & Bernard, 1983)
Some participants mention the accommodations teachers for students with special needs make for them. Each of the special education classrooms has a small back room where students may go when time away from others is needed. Some participants want the opportunity to talk about it with a teacher, some want to be left alone, and some want to talk to teachers they feel personally involved with. One student in the study wants the teacher to joke with him; one asks the teacher to send her home on “emergency removal.” The interventions these students requested were personal and individual, with no two students wanting to be treated the same when they were in crisis.

Analysis of the data showed some interventions teachers might make that would make the situation more volatile. A few of the participants said that if teachers acted as if they did not care the student was upset and just wanted the work done, this would push them over the edge. Other students had different triggers: giving a disciplinary consequence, trying to get the student to sit down, trying to get the student to talk before they were in ready, or making the adolescent stay in school where the problem is occurring.

When asked what adult the students preferred to talk to about a serious problem, every student said they would want to talk to the teachers for students with special needs, Mr. Goode. and/or Ms. Quail. Data analysis showed these teachers had laid groundwork for the students to come to them with their problems. They had explained their backgrounds working with students with special needs and did activities that led the students to develop trust in them. Participants believed these teachers would not just listen, but they would help, whether it was a school, home, or
personal problem. Because they felt valued as people and not just students, the adolescents also felt they could go to these teachers outside of school. In many cases, the teachers were part of the Crisis Plans.

Summary

Two areas regarding educational programming—the components of a teacher’s teaching style and structuring the classroom environment—strengthen previous research in mapping specific characteristics in these areas that are beneficial to students with emotional disturbance. A few things were surprising to the researcher such as one student who liked the teacher who yelled at him because yelling pushed the student to try harder, the fact that students generally did not study or complete homework outside of school, and that most participants did not consider schoolwork relevant to their goals in life. Data analysis clearly showed learning styles varied greatly among the participants so an individualized approach was needed.

The third area—specific discipline/classroom management practices—allowed new insight into aspects participants found favorable and unfavorable with discipline strategies. Behavior management is the area of greatest difficulty in school for the participants and necessitated their placement into a program for students with special needs. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to have an effective discipline program for success in the classroom. Data analysis showed participants felt many rules in place at the high school were unnecessary, and some behaviors were products of their emotional disturbance. For example, two students felt very anxious having students sit behind them in class. Many expressed difficulties caused by hyperactivity, such as having a hard time concentrating in class, difficulty completing homework, and
problems with sitting still in class or corrective learning all day. Other students talked about impulsivity which caused discipline referrals for inappropriate language and aggressive incidents.

These adolescents did not feel the consequences for inappropriate behavior helped in changing or preventing those behaviors. As detentions, corrective learning, and suspensions are not deemed effective by this population, students suggest a Crisis Plan instead where students talk to an understanding adult. Significant adults for every participant included the teachers of students with special needs, as these teachers built a foundation of trust and personal caring with the students. They also allowed these adolescents a connection with adults who regard them with compassion and communicate their wish to help.

An area of this study not previously explored in other research was successful and unsuccessful interventions to use with students when they were having a “bad day.” Data analysis showed no consistencies between student needs; students had very individual ideas about what helped them and what set them off on days when they were feeling volatile.

Implications

Introduction

This study was conducted because of the researcher’s experiences in education—both as a teacher of students with emotional disturbance and as an inclusion teacher. The researcher wanted to uncover perceptions of students with emotional disturbance to discover what they feel helps them to be successful in the educational environment. Questions about teacher’s teaching style, structure in the
classroom environment, and classroom management practices allowed participants to evaluate educational practices as to their helpfulness for students who are emotionally disturbed.

**Giving Students a Voice**

Jeremy (10-11-05) describes his inclusion teacher in a positive way: He likes “how she reacts to the kids/everybody in the class. Like different personalities; she know how to work with this kid, how to work with that one. I mean she more friendly as a teacher overall.” Unfortunately, Jeremy failed the class, which will cause him to fail the school year, which may lead him to drop out of high school. What went wrong?

Ali (10-6-05) wisely states, “Understand that every student in there is different. And as far as your job, you know, understand what you’re doing.” Data analysis in this study shows teachers cannot generalize strategies and approaches for students with emotional disturbance. Each child is unique with different opinions about teaching styles and behavioral approaches. They vary in styles of learning, academic ability, and types of disabilities such as hyperactivity, anxiety and impulsiveness. When students are having a “bad day,” an approach that works to calm one student may be the approach that leads to another student’s melt down.

The case studies showed two students who were very different in their personalities and what they look for in a teacher. Unfortunately, Jeremy had a teacher he considered wonderful, but he still failed the course because of behavior that caused him to be kicked out of class. Two other students, left the research project before the final interview because their behavior problems were too severe to be handled at the
high school. Both students ended up in a district program that is self-contained and is held off the grounds of the high school. Within a few months, Ricky dropped out of school.

Research shows that students with ED feel anonymous and powerless, alienated from their peers and school personnel (Mitra, 2004.) Voice is an excellent way for students to establish connection with others in school (Kroeger, et al., 2004.) It enables students to become active participants when empowered, develop skills in communication and self-advocacy, look at their learning styles and learning differences, and recognize accommodations that would help them learn. Through this self-awareness and self-knowledge, students may feel a partnership with teachers (Hapner & Imel, 2002.)

Maguire (2000) believes voice is important because students who perform poorly in school tend to be silent or even pushed out of the system. A chance for students to detail their school experiences may break apart some of the barriers that hold these students back from positive educational connections. Lincoln (1995) declares:

Not only are students stakeholders in their learning, but teachers can be too. Adults often underestimate the ability of children to be shrewd observers, to possess insight and wisdom about what they see and hear, and to possess internal resources we routinely underestimate. Children and adults combine power and create new forms of wisdom when they explore learning together. (p. 89)

Students with special needs should be encouraged to work with members of the multifactored evaluation team in determining educational programming and a behavior intervention plan. This study showed that students are able to voice school practices
that are effective and ineffective in promoting success for each individual in the classroom. As students are unique, with personal styles of learning which are met through individualized instructional strategies, they should be able to provide input into their lives at school. They also should help in long-range planning of their lives, deciding which classes further personal career and life goals.

**Implications for Educators**

The Council for Exceptional Children (2001) has published performance-based standards for teachers which address needs of students with exceptionalities. Results of this research study provide further support of standards in the areas of:

- **Standard 2: Development and Characteristics of Learners**—Educators must demonstrate respect for their students as unique human beings in the areas of the individual’s ability to learn, interact socially, and live as contributing members of society.

- **Standard 3: Individual Learning Differences**—Understanding differences in students’ learning styles allows educators to individualize instruction to provide meaningful learning for students with special needs.

- **Standard 4: Instructional Strategies**—Educators must possess a repertoire of instructional strategies to individualize instruction in the learning environment.

- **Standard 5: Learning Environments and Social Interactions**—Educators create opportunities for individuals with special needs so they are actively engaged in learning and afforded positive social interactions. When necessary, teachers should intervene during crisis to provide support to students with special needs.
Standard 10: Collaboration—Teachers of students with special needs should meet with inclusion teachers to assure the needs of students are addressed.

Inclusion is an accepted practice in schools and is meant to place students with disabilities in the general education setting when they can meet academic expectations (Friend & Bursuck, 2002.) However, behavior and work habits may interfere with success in an inclusion classroom even if academic levels are high enough that a student should be achieving. Data analysis in this study shows that educators may need to reassess what best serves students with emotional disturbance, as semester grades show that 50% of the students in this study did not pass their inclusion class. It appears students may fail the courses because behavior obstructs their success. When students miss class for disciplinary consequences of suspensions and corrective learning, they fall behind in academics. If students do not complete homework outside of school, the chance of passing classes is greatly compromised. When a student is kicked out of class for 3 weeks at the end of the grading period, the student will not pass. Jeremy shared since he was kicked out of his inclusion class, he will not pass 11th grade. Because he will not make up the missed credit in summer school, the chance of him dropping out of school greatly increases.

So why should a student with emotional disturbance be included in general classes? In the inclusive setting, social modeling is possible to help students learn to work with peers and follow rules (Wood & Cronin, 1999; Gallagher, 20020). Students with ED may feel less on the “fringe” and more connected with school personnel and peers. Students relate they learn more in the general education classes than the special
education classes because the academic requirements are more challenging (Klingner & Vaughn, 1998).

Site observations in this study found that many general education teachers are successful at reaching out to their students using humor, being helpful, and showing personal interest in their students. However, general education teachers may need to change their expectations for students with special needs so that these adolescents find success in general education classrooms. These students may suffer from weak academic skills which make reading and test-taking stressful and frustrating. Students ask that teachers help them study for tests by giving study guides and individual tutoring. They also request more work with peer partners or in groups so they can understand and complete assignments successfully. They state they will not do homework at home, so they may need more support in school or modified curriculum so they are able to pass classes. Students ask that disabilities such as hyperactivity, poor impulse control and social anxiety be considered in the classroom. Since most of the academic courses for students in this study were taken in classrooms for students with special needs, inclusion classes included courses such as gym, art, health, and shop. Possibly, students taking these classes could receive a pass/fail grade so they could be exposed to social situations with peers in general education classes and yet have a better chance through an adapted curriculum to pass and earn credit for their efforts there. This could be determined during the IEP meeting as a team decision. As the IEP is a binding legal document, all teachers would follow the guidelines for adapting curriculum, modifying expectations and assigning grades. In this way,
general education teachers would be able to change programming so that students with special needs could be successful in the general classroom.

This study details ways a teacher’s teaching style and classroom structure can be welcoming to students, which in itself may lead to less discipline problems. Gunter and Jack (1994) state interactions between teachers and students who display aggressive behavior are seldom positive. They recommend teachers develop a positive classroom environment to increase positive interactions. Having a discipline plan in place for students who are ED and exhibit aggressive behaviors is crucial. It is interesting that none of the participants in this study believe any of the aversive disciplinary consequences in place at their high school effect a change in their behavior. However, they believe the Crisis Plan gets them out of situations that may become explosive, and they feel the adults they talk to during the enactment of the Crisis Plan help them to deescalate and decompress before an outburst occurs. Thus, as the Crisis Plan was found to be effective in this study for students in demonstrating emotional disturbance, it is recommended that this disciplinary strategy be in place for all students whose functional behavior assessment shows the student needs help in controlling outbursts and aggressive behavior.

This study shows each student with emotional disturbance has unique needs that cannot be generalized to a large population of students with special needs. Having success with these students involves more than just academic expertise. Teachers need to know each individual and develop a relationship with each student to be effective. There are unique differences in learning styles, and preferred teacher approaches for developing a connection with students. The greatest disparity is noted in student
responses to effective approaches which help students on a “bad day,” and ineffective approaches which make things worse on a “bad day.” It would be well-advised for teachers to take the time to develop good relationships with these students, as they may survive a potentially explosive situation without the outburst. However, the general education teacher sees as many as 150 students each day. Is it realistic to expect them to personally know each adolescent in their care? Should they?

Implications for Educators of Students with Special Needs

In this study, data analysis showed students with ED believe the best teachers are teachers of students with special needs. These students perceive those teachers as being helpful with academic, social, and personal concerns. Participants listed these teachers as the adults they would ask for help and as personal friends who truly cared about them. They communicated the belief that these teachers helped them survive in school and in life outside of school.

As teachers of students with special needs are significant in their students’ lives, they may have the primary responsibility for helping students with ED. Because they know these students well on a personal level, teachers of students with special needs should also collaborate with general education teachers. Providing professional development to general education teachers may include sharing effective strategies developed from a functional behavior assessment made with the student’s input. Teachers of students with special needs could share academic strategies such as using headphones for test-taking to aid in concentration. They could provide assistance in classrooms for students with special needs by helping students study for tests over curriculum from their inclusion classes. These teachers could ensure that IEP goals
are written to change academic expectations in regular classes so that students with
special needs could be successful in general classrooms.

Teachers of students with special needs should take responsibility for teaching
social skills through discussions of students’ interactions with others and during
support classes. To become better prepared to handle problems that arise with their
students, teachers could collaborate with the school counselor and/or school
psychologist and attend professional inservices that provide training in intervention
strategies. Teachers of students with special needs ought to be members of a Crisis
Team when students need to de-stress by talking over their problems, and should
ensure that each student demonstrating emotional disturbance has a Crisis Plan in
place. It is also important that teachers be available for extra conference time during
the day so they are accessible to students when needed to avert a crisis, and also they
are available to collaborate with general education teachers in sharing strategies that
work with each individual student.

Implications for Society

The population identified for this study is at-risk for graduating high school, as
believe dropping out is a gradual process that initially begins with students deviating
from the social norm of school behavior. This study showed dropout students’
relationships with their teachers deteriorated significantly in 10th grade and became
worse in 12th grade.

Nine participants started this study at the beginning of a school year. By the
end of the year, Kyle dropped out of school after his referral to a more restrictive
placement. Jeremy, who failed his inclusion class, shared that he will not attend summer school to make up the missing credit he needs to graduate the school year, so he may also drop out this year. Disciplinary consequences in many schools remove students with emotional disturbance from the classroom through corrective learning or suspensions which increases academic difficulties for these students.

Many delinquent youth have been expelled or dropped out of school because their behaviors have not been compatible with school plans (Scott, Nelsonm, & Liaupsin, 2001). Also, youth with disabilities are over-represented in correctional facilities. Quinn, Rutherford, Leoone, Osher, and Poirier (2005) reported that 34% of juveniles in correctional facilities were identified as having disabilities, with 39% of that population identified as emotionally disturbed. Incarcerated youth have had more truancies, grade retentions, and suspensions than the general population, thus, behavioral patterns may lead students into juvenile delinquency.

Students with ED experience the highest unemployment, poorest work history, and highest number of social adjustment problems of any group with disabilities post-high school. (Wagner & Shaver, 1989.) Therefore, if the school environment can be improved, perhaps these dire consequences can be circumvented.

*Implications for Further Research*

Although this study provided data about perceptions of students with emotional disturbance concerning educational strategies at the high school, it only involved nine participants (three of whom were not present for the final interview.) The research site was a large suburban school in the Midwest and included only one girl, so future studies should be done at different sites, with more participants (especially girls), to
further corroborate these findings and provide additional insight. The study lasted 6 months, long enough for the researcher to observe each student in one inclusion class, interview each extensively, and look at documents related to grades and discipline offenses for a school semester. Following these students throughout their high school careers would give longitudinal data concerning progress in both inclusion classes and classes for students with special needs.

Further studies could also research punishment and other consequences for misbehavior. As student participants in this study felt traditional school punishments of detentions, corrective learning, and suspensions were not effective in changing behaviors, styles of discipline used successfully in inclusion classes with adolescents should be investigated. The Crisis Plan in effect at this high school should also be researched, to see if this plan could work successfully with other students with ED who are aggressive.

Some participants stated they did not read for pleasure, and that they preferred a teaching style of teaching without mandatory book reading by students. When asked, none said they had trouble reading, but the teacher of special needs felt most did struggle. Another study should research student reading levels to see weak skills in reading could be a cause of some of the frustration students with ED feel with academic coursework.

Students shared they rarely, if ever, were required to take homework home or required to study for tests at home. Most receive no help at home with homework or encouragement to complete work. They felt the teachers of special needs were the ones who helped them with assignments and studying during support classes. If the
practice of assigning homework does not work for this population, is there another strategy for reviewing material that could be more beneficial for these students?

Further research should examine the importance of teachers with special needs in developing a relationship with students who are emotionally disturbed. The teachers at this school were significant in the lives of their students, both in and out of school. Students felt these teachers truly cared about them and would help them with any problem they had. These educators helped with academics, counseling, and social skills. More importantly, these teachers were available when students needed them. It was apparent they were an essential connection between these students and the school environment.

Summary

This study examined the school environment from the viewpoint of students with emotional disturbance who are aggressive. Students shared aspects of a teacher’s teaching style and structuring the classroom environment that they found favorable and unfavorable. Participants discussed discipline strategies for general classroom management as well as strategies to help them when they were having a “bad day,” or a difficult time controlling themselves.

In this study, the teachers for students with special needs were essential to the well-being of the participants. They were friends, helpers, and counselors as well as these students’ teachers. They could become a valuable resource for the inclusion teachers as well as the students.

Data analysis showed that although these students generally shared common perceptions about favorable teaching style and methods, there were individual
preferences expressed for each student. Participants shared different learning styles impacted what they felt was effective in helping them be successful in the classroom. The greatest disparity in student responses was found in the area of discipline, especially what helps them on a “bad day.” Beneficial strategies which help one student may have been something that would set off another student. Research showed the importance of the teacher knowing each student as an individual and developing a relationship with these students.

Half of the students in this study were not successful in passing their inclusion class. Are we failing students with special needs by not providing strategies and support they need to be successful? Perhaps the answer is, “Do just one extra thing—many successful interventions, however minor they seem, have the potential to open a relationship that is helpful to student whose life is otherwise empty” (Diamond, 1991, p. 236).
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APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL

May 13, 2005

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Strongsville, Ohio 44136

Ms. Jenkins:

The University of Akron’s Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB) processed your Application for Review of the research project entitled: “Student Voice/ Input In Improving School Experiences for Students with Emotional Disturbance”. After initial review, it was determined that your project required a convened meeting held on May 11, 2005. The IRB application number assigned to this project is 20050403.

Your research is now approved without further qualifications for one year from the convened meeting date. If you wish to continue the project beyond one year, you must submit a request for continuing review to the IRB. Any changes in the original research protocol must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

Enclosed are the informed consent documents, which the IRB has approved for your use in this research. Copies of these documents are to be submitted with any application for continuation of this project.

Please note that within two months of the expiration date of this approval, the IRB will forward an annual review reminder notice to you by email as a courtesy. Nevertheless, please note that it is your responsibility as principal investigator to remember the renewal date of your protocol’s review.

If your project terminates prior to the annual renewal date, please complete the Final Report Form in order to close your IRB file.

Please retain this letter for your files. If this research is being conducted for a master’s thesis or doctoral dissertation, you must file a copy of this letter with the thesis or dissertation. If you should have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Phil Allen, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board

CC: Walter Yoder, Department Chair
    Evonna Wetton, Advisor
    Phil Allen, IRB Chair
APPENDIX B

MEETING WITH SITE ADMINISTRATORS

Meeting with HS

1. Permission to do study at HS?

2. IRB form—just to Pupil Personnel Director?

3. Review and sign letter to parents and students

4. Documented aggression--Permission to read files or behavior intervention plan or discipline records at HS or IEPs at Student Services

5. Discipline policy for HS (student handbook) and for students with ED

6. List of recommended students:
   - ED
   - Inclusion class
   - Aggressive, acting-out

7. Contact person at HS? How frequent contacts?

8. ED teachers’ names:
   - Ms. Quail
   - Mr. Goode

9. Middle school also?

10. ASAP program? Middle schools for list of students?
11. Permission to observe classes? How will teachers know?

12. Where we could go for interviews?

13. Student who threatens harm to self or another?
APPENDIX C

LETTER REQUESTING CHILD PARTICIPATION IN
THE STUDY AND CONSENT FORM

(Letterhead of University of Akron)
August 20, 2005

Dear Parents:

Your name was given to me by your child’s teacher at the high school. I am a doctoral student at The University of Akron. I am writing a dissertation about improving school experiences for special education students placed in inclusion classes. In my study, I will interview several high school students about their school experiences. I will ask questions about teacher qualities they like and dislike, factors in the room environment that help or hurt them in being successful in school and discipline policies that help or hinder their best effort at school. I will also ask your child to provide work samples from his classes for me to view. The results of this dissertation will help classroom teachers find out what strategies adolescents feel are beneficial to them in the classroom.

I need your help! Your child was recommended by his teacher, and I would like him to be one of my participants in the study. I would come to school 3-5 times during the school year to ask him questions about school. He would have a chance to tell me what he thinks (for example: What makes a good teacher/what makes a bad teacher?) I will tape what he says so I can write it down later and study it. I will put the interviews of my participants together and write a dissertation paper about the results. I will bring some type of “thank-you-treat” each time I talk with him (pop, potato chips, etc.) I would anticipate he would enjoy talking me and sharing his experiences.

I want you to know that his participation is voluntary, and if you do not want him to participate or he does not want to participate, he doesn’t have to participate. Also, this study will be confidential and no one will know what he specifically said to me. I will write down what he said on the tapes using pseudonyms for himself and any teachers mentioned so true names are not used. His participation will not have any implications for his relationship to teachers and school personnel. The tapes will be kept in a locked cabinet at my home. As soon as I write down the information, I will destroy the tapes, and all tapes will be destroyed within five years. Please know that district policy will be followed should your child make statements indicating risk to self or others.
I have permission to do this study from the school principal, from the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at The University of Akron, and will need your consent also. If you are willing, you need to sign the attached form and return it to your child’s home room teacher by September 5, 2005. If you have any questions about my research project, please feel free to contact me via email at jenkins@strongnet.com or by phone: 440-238-4087, or you may contact my advisor Evonn Welton, Ph.D. at 1-330-972-6742. Questions about research participation can also be directed to Ms. Sharon McWhorter, Associate Director, Research Services, at 1-330-972-7666 or 1-888-232-8790. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Ruth Jenkins, Doctoral Candidate
If you agree to your child’s participation in this research project, please sign below and return to your child’s home room teacher at school.

I give consent for my child to participate in the research project done by Ruth Jenkins. This will involve meeting for interviews 3-5 times this school year at the high school. Interviews will be taped and transcribed, and the confidential information will be used in a dissertation paper. I also understand that my child’s participation is strictly voluntary, and that my child may choose to withdraw from the study at any time.

______________________________  ________________________________
Parent/Guardian             Date
APPENDIX D

INVITATION FOR PARTICIPATION

(Letterhead of University of Akron)
August 20, 2005

Dear Student:

My name is Mrs. Jenkins and I am a student at The University of Akron. I would like to invite you to participate in a research study I am conducting. I would like to come to the high school 3-5 times and talk to you about your experiences at school. I will ask questions about what qualities you like and dislike in teachers, aspects of your classroom that help you pay attention in class, and what discipline strategies you feel are most successful for teachers to use with high school students. I will also ask you to bring work samples from your class for me to view. Results of my study will help classroom teachers know what students feel best help them in school.

I want you to know that what you tell me about your school experiences will be confidential so no one will know exactly what you say. I will tape our interviews so that I can study them and write down the information you tell me. I will keep the tapes locked in a cabinet at my home until I am finished writing down the information on them. I will destroy the tapes as soon as I copy the information down or after 5 years. Please know that district policy will be followed should you make statements indicating risk to self or others.

I have permission from your principal and your parents for your participation in this study, but the final decision to participate is up to you. If you decide you no longer wish to participate, you are free to stop at any time. I think you will enjoy the opportunity to tell me how you feel about things at school and participate in a research study. I will be bringing some kind of treat for you (can of pop, potato chips, etc.) each time we talk to show you my appreciation for your participation.
If you have any questions about the study, please ask your home room teacher or your principal. If you would like to participate in the study, please sign on the line below and bring this form back to your home room teacher.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Jenkins

____________________________________________________________________

I understand the research study Mrs. Jenkins is conducting. I am signing this form because I would like to participate in the interview process.

___________________________________________         __________________
(Student Signature)     (Date)
Dear Inclusion Teacher:

I am currently working to complete my dissertation, which is my last requirement for the PhD program at The University of Akron. Ms. Quail and Mr. Goode identified a small group of high school students that I will be using in my dissertation research. I will be questioning these students to ask them what they perceive to be educational practices that help keep them engaged in learning.

I need to observe these students one time during a general education class and then interview each student 3-5 times during special education class periods. I would like to observe in your classroom, room 216, on Tuesday, September 27, 2005, during fifth period. I would be happy to meet with you before the observation if you have any questions or concerns (I will be at the high school Thursday morning). Please email me at jenkins@strongnet.org if you do or if this date does not work for you.

I have permission from the students, parents, the HS principal, Pupil Personnel Director, and the Superintendent to do this study. I really appreciate you allowing me access to this one class with you. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Ruth Jenkins
APPENDIX F
A PRIORI CODE LIST FOR SITE OBSERVATION
USED TO DEVELOP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

**Topics of Interest Based on Lit Review:**
Voice of Students with Emotional Disturbance in Evaluating School Experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research questions</th>
<th>Behaviors of Interest</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Methods in structuring learning</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lecture</td>
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<td>Computers</td>
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<td>Group Work</td>
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<td>Student input</td>
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<td>Projects</td>
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<td>Independent reading</td>
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<td>Note taking</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Hand outs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Characteristics of teacher/teaching style</td>
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<tr>
<td>Calm, accepting manner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humor:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sarcasm/Teasing students or self/Jokes</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal Interest:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Calls me by name/Asks how I am/</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Comments on previous conversations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relates personal information</td>
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<tr>
<td>Empathy/caring</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Discipline in classroom</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rules:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Consistency/Fairness/Flexibility</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Consequences/Punishments</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rewards/Positives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX G

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview #2

Interview questions will be semi-structured based on these questions and participant observations.

Discuss questions formed from the observation.

Was the day I observed a typical day? Why?

Were these typical activities? What are other ones this teacher did that you liked or didn’t like?

Did I see typical interactions with students? What are some interactions you’ve seen that you liked or didn’t like?

Describe the discipline/homework/late work policies in the classroom. Is this effective or not?

What do you like and dislike about this teacher? Is teacher a good or bad teacher? Why?

Do you have any documents for me?

Interview #3

Member checking

Today in this interview, I would like you to give me a list of things about a good teacher. I would like you to tell me:

1. What a good teacher has or is………

2. What things a good teacher does, like methods of instruction………
3. Things a good teacher says in the classroom……

I’ll put a copy of this list here so you can refer to it if you need to. I’m going to be writing down your answers for you.

Any questions?

Now, could you tell me some things?

Could you tell me about your worst teacher ever at school?

Tell me about your worst experiences at school?

If you were having a bad day, what could a bad teacher do to make it worse?

Could you tell me about your best teacher ever?

Tell me about your best experiences at school.

If you were having a bad day, what could a good teacher do to make it better?

Interview #4

Age:

Grade in school?

Have you ever been retained in school? When and why?

Do you like school?

What year did you start in special ed?

Prefer spec ed classes or regular ed and why?

Subjects you like in school?

Subjects you dislike in school?

Do you like to read? Is reading hard or easy for you?

Do you do homework at school or home? Who helps you?

Homework policy at home.

Parent’s view on your education/spec ed/reg ed/

Do your parents enforce homework time at home?

Parents’ style of discipline. Is that the most effective style with you?

If you were the teacher, what rules and consequences would you have?

What rules are important?
What rules are not important?
Have you ever been treated unfairly by a teacher?
Have you ever been suspended? Expelled? Corrective learning? Are those discipline strategies effective in stopping unacceptable behavior?
How would you structure the day so students could best learn and be focused on lessons?
If you had a problem, which adult would you talk to and why? Parent, teacher, counselor, relative.
Interests?
Goals in life?
Will school help you reach these goals?

Discuss documents

Pile Sorting and Ranking: Use cards in category 1 (teaching characteristics) and category 2 (teaching methods)

1. Put these in piles of very important or desirable, somewhat important or desirable, not important.

2. Then rank them.

Interview #5

1. Any more documents? Look through and explain the papers. Tell me your opinion of the papers.

2. Pile sorting on discipline. Use cards for category 3 (discipline).
   1. Put them in piles of very important, somewhat important, not important.
   2. Then rank them. Write down numbers and separate top 10.

3. Set out top ten discipline cards, top ten teacher characteristics, and top ten methods. Choose ten cards from any piles that you feel are most important and tell me why.

4. Read cards in category 4 (on what participants said should be done by teachers on a “bad day.”) These are the responses I got. What is your interpretation of them? Do you agree with them?
5. Give any benefits of emergency removal, Corrective Learning, suspension, expulsion.

6. Give an example of each of the top ten responses for qualities of a good teacher and good teaching methods.

7. If you had one piece of advice for teachers that would help them be successful in working with you, what would it be?

8. If you had one piece of advice for teachers that would help them be successful with other special ed students in your classes, what would it be?
## Teacher’s Teaching Style

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>How to talk/ relate to kids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Be understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Add humor</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Be blunt, honest, and open</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Make the class fun.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Be nice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Not be stuck up</td>
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<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Not be bossy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Be respectful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Help students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Trust you and believe you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Should be a friend by caring outside of school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Should not get in your personal business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Be someone you can joke with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Not be too strict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Should relate personal experiences like yours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Wants you to call them for help with your personal problems</td>
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<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Be patient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Ask how you feel when you’ve been absent.</td>
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<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Thinks you can do well and wants you to pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Should have a good personality</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

## Structure of Classroom Environment—Free List

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>A teacher should let you form your own opinions.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>---</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>A teacher should give you notes about the material.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>There should be in depth class discussions about the material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Class work should be hands-on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Computer use is good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>The class should be more than just reading the material.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>The reading material should not be too hard.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Class should have variety (work alone sometimes, some-times in group.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>A teacher should really be into the subject material.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>A teacher should relate work to a student’s interests (skateboarder)…</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Schoolwork should be personally relevant.</td>
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<td>12.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Group work is good.</td>
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<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>It’s good to work with a partner to get feedback.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>It’s good to have little or no homework.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>A teacher should make the class fun.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>A teacher should let you do other homework when class work is done.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>A teacher should offer extra credit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>A good teacher helps you study for tests (study guide, use notes on test, plays games)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>A teacher should give less notes and reading.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Specific Discipline/Classroom Management Practices—Free List**

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<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Dress code is not important.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>When a teacher tells me what to do, it makes me angry.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Sending me to a counselor/teacher to talk out a problem is effective</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Students should not have to wear IDs</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Inappropriate language should not be punished.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Students should not have to change clothes for gym.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Students can get work done while talking.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Incentives work to make good behavior.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>When parents are called, my behavior improves.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Too many teachers show favoritism to some students</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Having boys and girls together in class is distracting.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Students should sit at separate desks-not lg. table</td>
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<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>There should be little on walls to distract.</td>
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<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>You should be able to choose where you sit.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Teachers should not yell a lot.</td>
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<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>A teacher should remind you to turn in late work.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>A good teacher yells to motivate.</td>
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<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>A teacher should allow eating and drinking in class</td>
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<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>A teacher should allow late work</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>If you goof off in class, a good teacher joins in.</td>
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<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>A good teacher is not strict and has few rules.</td>
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<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>A good teacher pushes you to do well.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>You should be allowed to listen to music with headphones to help concentration.</td>
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