Exploring the K–12 Teacher-Student Relationship:
Strategies Teachers Use to Influence Students With Emotional Disabilities' School Experiences

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the K-12 teacher-student relationship (TSR) by identifying strategies that teachers use to influence students with emotional disabilities' (EDs) school experiences socially, academically, and behaviorally (SAB). The identified strategies were organized around the four phases (appraisal, testing, agreement, and planning) of building teacher-student relationships. This was a qualitative study that involved nine interviews with teachers (6 elementary, 1 middle, and 2 high school) from two school divisions (one rural and one suburban) in southwest Virginia. Data analysis included inductive and deductive coding of the transcribed interviews to identify strategies that teachers use to influence students with EDs SAB and to align the identified strategies within the four phases of building TSRs. Findings of the study suggest five key strategies that teachers are using to influence students socially, five key strategies that teachers are using to influence students academically, and eight key strategies that teachers are using to influence students behaviorally. Additionally, five strategies aligned within the appraisal phase, six strategies aligned within the agreement phase, nine strategies aligned within the testing phase, and nine strategies aligned within the planning phase. The results of this study could provide further insight to scholars to support the need for teachers to use research/ evidence-based strategies when working with students with EDs to assist the students in achieving better outcomes. Educational leaders and teachers are provided with strategies they can use when working with students with EDs to improve school related outcomes and build teacher-student relationships (TSRs).

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

This study explored the K-12 teacher-student relationship (TSR) by identifying key strategies that teachers are using to influence students with emotional disabilities socially, academically, and behaviorally. Additionally, the identified strategies were organized around the four phases (appraisal, testing, agreement, and planning) of relationship building. This was a qualitative study that involved nine interviews with teachers (6 elementary, 1 middle, and 2 high school) from two school divisions (one rural and one suburban) in southwest Virginia. The findings of this study should provide scholars with additional research to support the need for teachers to use research/evidence-based strategies when working with students with EDs to assist the students in achieving better outcomes. Educational leaders and teachers are provided with strategies they can use when working with students with EDs to improve school related outcomes and build teacher-student relationships (TSRs).

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my family. To my parents, Zeke and Linda, you have been my biggest supporters throughout his journey and in life. There are no words to express how grateful I am to have you as my parents. To my siblings, Zeke Jr. and Eunisa, the guidance and encouragement you provided to me during this journey was endless. To my nieces and nephew, always remember no dream is too big to make into a reality. To my grandparents in heaven, I did it!

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Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the K–12 teacher-student relationship (TSR) by identifying strategies that teachers use to influence students with emotional disabilities' (EDs') school experiences socially, academically, and behaviorally (SAB). Insight on the influence of school experiences and strategies were sought from elementary, middle, and high school teachers currently teaching or who have taught students with EDs. The strategies were organized around the four phases (appraisal, testing, agreement, and planning) of building teacher-student relationships.

The study was guided by four research questions: 1) What strategies do teachers who teach populations with emotional disabilities use to influence their students' school experience socially? 2) What strategies do teachers who teach populations with emotional disabilities use to influence their students' school experience academically? 3) What strategies do teachers who teach populations with emotional disabilities use to influence their students' school experience behaviorally? 4) How do the strategies that have been identified align with the four phases (appraisal, testing, agreement, and planning) of building teacher-student relationships?

Statement of the Problem

Students with EDs are at a greater risk than other students with disabilities (SWD) of experiencing negative outcomes socially, academically, and behaviorally in school, which can influence graduation and postsecondary goals (Freeman, Yell, Shriner, & Karsiyannis, 2019; Mitchell, Kern, & Conroy, 2019; State, Simonsen, Hirn, & Wills, 2019). Although the federal policy Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA, 2004) ensured that SWD are included in schools, requiring schools to meet the needs of all students, and provide funding to support development

and implementation of evidence-based practices (Freeman et al., 2019), students with EDs are still struggling to succeed. Socially, as noted by Wilhite and Bullock (2012) a "defining characteristic" of students with EDs is having a "lack of social competence" (p. 175). According to Freeman et al. (2019), academic performance (reading, math, and writing) of students with EDs is one to two years below grade level. Behaviorally, students with EDs are more likely to be excluded from school and experience behavior interventions such as restraints and seclusions more than other SWD (Mitchell et al., 2019). It is critical for teachers of student with EDs to use research/evidence-based strategies to support students in all areas of the school experience to achieve better outcomes (Mitchell et al., 2019; State et al., 2019; Zaheer et al., 2019).

Significance of the Study

The significance of the study is multifaceted. First, building effective relationships with students is an important link to student development and success (Hunt, Rasor, & Patterson, 2019; McGrath & Van Bergan, 2015; Newberry, 2010; Sabol & Pianta, 2012). According to the initial preparation standard, Learner Development and Individual Learning Differences, developed by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC, 2015), all special education teachers should have the ability to "establish and maintain rapport with individuals with and without exceptionalities" (p. 162). Murphy (2016) stated that there is a relation between learning and social interaction, which work best in combination.

Second, students with EDs have the worst school related outcomes of all SWD, when compared to SWD and typically developing peers (Mitchell et al., 2019). That is cause for concern because students with EDs represent a small percentage (1%) of SWD nationally (Mitchell et al., 2019; State et.al., 2019). There is a significant issue of "bridging the research-to-practice gap" (State et al., 2019, p. 108) to improve school experiences for students with EDs.

Continued research on the implementation of strategies used to influence school experiences for students with EDs has the potential to add to the literature and provide insight on how to improve school experiences for students with EDs. Educators are provided with research/ evidence-based strategies they can utilize when working with students with EDs to help them improve social, academic, and behavioral experiences while at school and build TSRs. Educational leaders can use the strategies to help educators and support staff such as paraprofessionals build relationships with students with EDs. In addition, the study guides educational leaders in providing professional development (PD) to support these professionals in building relationships and improving students with EDs school experiences. Scholars are given access to additional research through this study to investigate the use of research/evidence-based strategies for working with students with EDs to help professionals assist this population in achieving better outcomes.

Purpose and Justification for the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the K–12 teacher-student relationship (TSR) by identifying strategies that teachers use to influence students with emotional disabilities' (EDs') school experiences socially, academically, and behaviorally (SAB). Insight on the influence of school experiences and strategies used were sought from elementary, middle, and high school teachers currently teaching students with EDs. The strategies are organized around the four phases (appraisal, testing, agreement, and planning) of building teacher-student relationships.

A goal was to add to current literature on TSRs, increase literature on TSRs with students with EDs, and provide educators with strategies to implement to support students with EDs. The acknowledgment and understanding of elementary, middle, and high school teachers' perspectives may generate new insights that can benefit students, teachers, and educational

leaders. The results of the study should provide educators at all levels with practical outcomes and strategies to apply to TSRs.

Research Questions

The research questions are:

1. What strategies do teachers who teach populations with emotional disabilities use to influence their students' school experience socially?

2. What strategies do teachers who teach populations with emotional disabilities use to influence their students' school experience academically?

3. What strategies do teachers who teach populations with emotional disabilities use to influence their students' school experience behaviorally?

4. How do the strategies that have been identified align with the four phases (appraisal, testing, agreement, and planning) of building teacher-student relationships?

Definition of Terms

Emotional disability (ED): According to the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), the disability is defined as "a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree, which adversely affects educational performance:

- an inability to learn which cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors;

- an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers;

- inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances;

- a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; or

- a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

The term *ED* includes children who are schizophrenic but does not include children who are socially maladjusted unless it is determined that they are emotionally disturbed" (VDOE, 2020). Students are "characterized by inappropriate classroom behaviors such as disruptions, aggression, off-task behaviors that create substantial challenges for teachers and other school personnel, and academic difficulty" (Sutherland & Singh, 2004, p. 169).

Individualized Education Program (IEP): Contains the services and placement for students with disabilities and developed by the local school division. The IEP addresses the following:

- Present level of academic achievement

- Measurable annual goals

- Benchmarks or short-term objectives

- Special education, related services, supplementary aids and services

- Participation with children without disabilities

- Participation in state and division-wide assessments

- Duration, frequency, and location of services

- Progress report schedule

- Initial transition

- Secondary transition (VDOE, 2021)

Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (*PSEL) 2015:* Incorporated into laws and regulations these standards are the core understandings of school administration (Murphy,

2016) and the "qualities and values of effective educational leaders" (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015, p. 4).

School experience: The "development across social, emotional, behavioral, and academic" areas (McGrath & Bergen, 2015, p. 2).

Strategy: An action, physical or verbal interaction, that teachers use to produce a desirable outcome for students.

Students With Disabilities (SWD): "The IDEA incorporates a categorical definition of "disability," identifying a covered "child with a disability" as any "child" having at least one of 13 conditions specifically categorized in the act". Also, requiring "special education and related services to benefit from public education" (Dragoo, Cole, & Library of Congress, 2019, p. 4)

Teacher-student relationship (TSR): Interactions between teachers and students that are an important part of development for both teacher and student (Mason, Hajovsky, McCune, & Turek, 2017; Xu & Yang, 2019). The terms *student-teacher relationship* and *teacher-student relationship* are interchangeable throughout this review.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations of this study included a small sample size restricted to teachers who teach or previously taught students with ED and schools for which there is typically only one such specialist per site. The southwest region of Virginia, targeted for the study, posed a geographical limitation. Also, gathering data during the COVID – 19 pandemic was a limitation. There were several delimitations. The researcher chose to do the study in the southwest of Virginia due to the large amount of rural school divisions located within the region. The participants were limited to special education teachers who were teaching or who had previously taught students with EDs in elementary, middle, and high school. To control bias, the researcher relied on the

literature and avoided inserting opinions during the interviews. To assist in receiving authentic perspectives from the interviewees, the two teachers that fit the criteria for the study who currently teach under the supervision of the researcher were excluded from participating.

Summary

This chapter introduced the focus of the research study. It detailed the overview of the study, statement of the problem, significance of the study, purpose and justification of the study, research questions, definition of terms, and limitations, and delimitations. Chapter 2 provides a review of relevant literature on TSRs. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology for the research study. Also, it addresses the methods for data collection and analysis to answer the research questions. Chapter 4 summarizes the analysis of the nine interviewees' responses to the research questions. Findings, summary, and conclusions are discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the K–12 teacher-student relationship (TSR) by identifying strategies that teachers use to influence students with emotional disabilities' (EDs') school experiences socially, academically, and behaviorally (SAB). Insight on the influence of school experiences and strategies used were sought from elementary, middle, and high school teachers currently teaching students with EDs. The strategies are organized around the four phases (appraisal, testing, agreement, and planning) of building teacher-student relationships.

The literature reviewed in this paper concerns teacher-student relationships (TSRs) and how this relationship can influence school experiences for students in general and special categories. The research explains what TSRs are and provides insight into the components that form the relationship. This review is structured around the following topics: (a) synthesis of the relationships (theories of TSRs, phases of TSRs, themes of TSRs, and data collections methods of TSRs), and (b) teaching students with emotional disabilities (EDs), (c) implications for educational leaders, and (d) summary of literature reviewed. A few relevant policy and practice issues are raised and discussed. The synthesis of information focuses on the prominent theories, identified phases, themes, and data collection methods regarding TSRs. Teaching students with EDs emphasizes strategies to support students and the physical classroom environment. The implications for educational leaders addresses two main focus areas, professional standards and professional development (PD), to support the needs of student with EDs. The research summary table in Appendix A contains salient sources that were reviewed. The summary discusses the conclusions and implications of TSRs.

Synthesis of Teacher-Student Relationships

The synthesis of literature begins with a review of the three theories associated with TSRs: attachment theory, self-determination theory, and ecological systems theory. Then identified relationship phases of TSRs are discussed. The next section describes the themes related to TSRs: closeness and conflict, holistic impact, and data collection methods. Finally, in the summary implications of the literature are considered.

When examining TSRs, researchers have become aware of the significance of TSRs and the influence they have on the school experience for students (Brinkwortha, McIntyre, Juraschek, & Gehlbach, 2018). Murray and Pianta (2007) noted that "teacher beliefs, behaviors, and actions also affect TSRs" (p. 109). Davis (2003) noted that as children develop, their relationships affect their school engagement. Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, and Oort (2011) discussed the quality of the TSR having an impact on "students' social functioning", "behavior problems", "engagement in learning activities", and "academic achievement" (p. 493). TSRs can affect behavior, academic, and other domains of a student's school experience (McGrath & Van Bergan, 2014; Newberry, 2010).

Policy and governance issues are still emerging concerning TSRs. Although Talley (2009) centered the policy and governance issues around teacher encouragement and the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. His research indicated that every school division should have a written policy calling for the encouragement of high levels of performance from students and teachers. Also, in an effort to "ensure that every student in Virginia attends a school that maximizes their potential and prepares them for the future: academically, socially, and emotionally" (VDOE, 2021) the VDOE has created social emotional learning (SEL) guidance standards for all K-12 students which are aligned with the Profile of a Virginia Graduate and

centered in equity (Virginia Social Emotional Learning Standards Draft, 2021). According to, The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) SEL is defined as "the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions" (CASEL, 2021). The Virginia K-12 SEL Standards will address five competencies: "Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social-Awareness, Relationship Skills, and Decision Making" (p. 7). The relationship skills competency will focus on two areas and are cited verbatim: (a) Apply positive verbal and non-verbal communication and listening skills to interact with other, form and maintain positive relationships, and resolve conflict constructively. (communication) and (b) Demonstrate the ability to effectively collaborate and navigate relationships while valuing different and diverse perspectives, backgrounds and cultures. (collaboration) (p. 8).

Negative TSRs are fostered more often with students who are at risk of having difficult behavior and/or special academic needs (Murray & Pianta, 2007; Newberry, 2010; Rudasil, Reio, Stipanovic, & Taylor, 2007). Murray and Pianta (2007) discussed that "students with high-incidence disabilities" have an increased chance of "experiencing a number of social, emotional, and behavioral" problems (p. 106). According to McGrath and Van Bergan (2015), it is vital that educators understand who is most likely to be involved in a negative teacher-student relationship (TSR), importance of the TSR, why relationships fluctuate in quality, and what these differences are connected to. Hunt and Mullen (2021) noted "students from various backgrounds who perceive their teachers as valuing them, and supportive of their interests and needs, are more likely advancing socially, academically, and behaviorally" (p. 2).

In reviewing the Approval of Education Programs in Virginia section of the Implementation Manual for the Regulations Governing the Review and Approval of Education Programs in Virginia (Virginia Department of Education, 2007) teaching relationship building skills is not explicitly stated as a requirement of teacher preparatory programs. In the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium's (InTASC) standard nine, created by the Council of Chief State School Officers (2011), practices that foster relationship building are embedded. Frelin (2015) stated that "Because positive teacher-student relationships are particularly important for students who are at risk of failing school, both teachers and students benefit from support in developing such relationships" (p. 590). For student with disabilities is it "particularly important to find ways to improve the quality of relationships" they develop with teachers. (Murray & Pianta, 2007, p. 107).

Theories of Teacher-Student Relationships

The literature on this topic is informed by three theories: attachment theory, self-determination theory, and ecological theory. These theories are complementary and together provide a cohesive framework of the relational, motivation, and contextual aspects of TSRs (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015). The researched reviewed on the theories were predominantly retrieved from psychology journals and websites.

Attachment Theory. Attachment theory is a concept from developmental psychology. It is critical to people's development to "attach" themselves physically and emotionally to a primary caregiver. By attaching himself or herself to this caregiver, a person feels more secure and can grow and develop appropriately. When detailing factors related to TSRs, attachment theory is frequently reviewed (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015). Early research in attachment theory concentrated on parent-child relationships (Davis, 2003; Sabol & Pianta, 2012), while

recent research has investigated TSRs with the viewpoint that a caring and supportive teacher can have a meaningful impact in shaping adolescents' outcomes (Mason et al., 2017; Watson, 2018). Specifically, Davis (2003) stated, "Researchers working from an attachment perspective conceptualize teacher-child relationship as extensions of the parent-child relationship" (p. 209).

Although, students are attached initially to their parents the "later-emerging relationships with teachers are also important" (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015, p. 2). The quality of this relationship can affect "multiple domains" for students (Sabol & Pianta, 2012, p. 216). Watson (2018) detailed key points that further define attachment theory:

1. Securely attached children enter school assuming goodwill and will seek collaborative relationships with their teachers and classmates.

2. Insecurely attached children will mistrust their teachers and classmates and will seek control or will be withdrawn.

3. Teachers can alter the course of insecurely attached students by persistent affirmation of the child's worth and their own trustworthiness.

4. Teachers' own attachment histories may make it harder to trust and support students, especially misbehaving students, but teachers' insecure attachment histories can be overcome. (p. 21)

According to Davis (2003), "Research studies conceptualizing student-teacher relationships from an attachment perspective indicate, as early as preschool, that the quality of teacher-child relationships influences children's social and cognitive development" (p. 210). McGrath and Van Bergan (2015) and "Attachment Theory" (n.d) found that children who struggle to form attachments with their caregivers do not have a "secure base" to seek reassurance when they try new experiences (p. 2).

Self-Determination Theory. Self-determination theory is a theory of motivation that is fundamental in cognitive and social development. Consisting of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation the theory has a "multidimensional approach to motivation" (Taylor, Jungert, Mageau, Schattke, Dedic, Rosenfield, & Koestner, 2014, p. 342). An intrinsically motivated person participates in an activity because they enjoy it and they are interested in the activity. On the contrary, an extrinsic motivated person participates in an activity due to the consequence that the activity is link to (i.e., doing homework to get a reward) (Taylor et al. 2014; ("Theory," n.d.). In the school environment the self-determination theory is dependent on the following: competence, relatedness, and autonomy, which are universal and psychological needs (McGrath & Van Bergan, 2015). Competence, relatedness, and autonomy are thought to foster high quality forms of motivation and engagement for activities, including enhanced performance, persistence, and creativity ("Theory," n.d.). When these psychological needs are not met within an environment, there is a negative impact on the wellness of the setting ("Theory," n.d.).

Competence refers to the need for learners to have confidence that they can achieve desired outcomes. Learners are experiencing *autonomy* when they initiate engagement in an activity ("Theory," n.d.). *Relatedness*, having a secure and satisfying relationship, is of particular significance to TSRs (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015). Researchers have noted student characteristics such as ethnicity, age, and gender can influence the TSR (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015; Virat, 2020) and how the students and teachers relate to each other (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015). The idea that peer acceptance or rejection influences TSRQ is centered around the reasoning that peer acceptance affects students' engagement in the classroom and academic self-efficacy both which may influence teacher student interactions (Hughes & Chen, 2011).

Ecological Systems Theory. Bronfenbrenner (as cited by Oswalt; PsychologyNotes HQ, 2013) created this system to explain how a child's environment and surroundings intermingle to influence the development and growth of the child. He identified five systems or environments that influence a child's development: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. In relation to TSRs the microsystem and the mesosystem are most relevant based on how they are defined. The microsystem is the smallest and the most direct environment that the child lives in. Personal relationships with family members, caregivers (parents and teachers), and peers are included in the Microsystem. The influences of those relationships are mutual and the connections within these relationships affect how the child grows and reacts to situations. The Mesosystem encompasses the experiences and relationships the developing child has within the different microsystems s/he is a part of (i.e., school environment). For example, linkages can form between home and school and the student's relationship with their parents can guide the relationship with their teacher. Indirectly people and places can influence a child's life as explained by the Exosystem. This happens when there is a connection between two settings with the child not being a part of one of the settings (i.e., home and a parent's workplace). The largest influence (people and places) on a child's development is in Macrosystem and it consists of the child's beliefs, cultural values, economic and political structures. The Chronosystem, the last ecosystem, has the influence of time, change, and consistency in a child's life (i.e., change of address or family structure). Ecological systems theory in relation to TSRs implies that peer acceptance is persuaded by students' observations of the TSR (McGrath & Van Bergan, 2015). Students' perceptions of interactions between teacher and students may influence how they view those students on multiple dimensions (Hughes & Chen, 2011).

Newberry's Phases of Building TSRs

The literature reviewed on the phases of building TSRs are centered on research completed by Newberry. Phases of TSRs have been identified as a cycle: appraisal, testing, agreement, and planning (Newberry, 2010). Newberry recognized these phases during a study on individual relationship building over time.

Newberry (2010) investigated the changes in a single relationship between one student and his teacher. The study follows the relationship as it goes from one of "ethical care" to "mutual respect and enjoyment" (p. 1696). Eighteen hours of observations were conducted and field notes were taken during the observations. Newberry's interviews were conducted using the Adapted IOS protocol, recorded, and transcribed for analysis. The protocol consisted of the teacher drawing circles on a dotted line. The circles represented the perceived closeness in the TSR and this protocol was completed for each student in the class. This protocol was completed four times during the school year: two weeks after school started, winter break, spring break, and at the end of the year. The teacher wrote reflections on the interviews a week after each interview four times a year and this information was used along with the classroom observations and interviews to triangulate that data. The study was completed through a phenomenological lens guided by the researcher's interest in classroom behaviors, mediating processes within TSRs, and direct development of the relationship. A data matrix was used to display the incident, data sources, teacher action, teacher notes, and student action. The results yielded from the week-by-week data collection methods (observations, structured and semi structured interviews, and written reflections) produced multiple distinct phases in the relationship building process.

During the relationship building process people and procedures were introduced, expectations were established and accepted, those same expectations were questioned and

explored, and needs and plans were reevaluated and revised. These patterns would become routine for interaction, or the process would begin again for the student and the teacher. This research was part of a larger study conducted to understand the human condition of relationship formation. The purpose of the larger study was to view different behaviors performed by the teacher with groups of students and how those interactions impacted the perception of the TSR. When Newberry recognized these phrases, she cross validated the data by coding for these phases in the larger data set and found four distinct phases of relationship building in the way the teacher built and maintained relationships with all of her students. This teacher passed through and revisited these phases until she and the student were content in the TSR.

The TSR building phases are key components to building and maintaining TSRs. The appraisal phase requires informal gathering of information for both parties involved, sorting out roles, and resolving any ideas the parties might have about each other. The teacher in the study would conduct activities in the classroom that would allow her to get to know each student during this phase. Meeting the families is included in this phase as well.

During the agreement phase, the roles are accepted, expectations are outlined, and power struggles are defined. Hunt and Mullen noted that "routines and patterns follow the appraisal phases or, more realistically, are intertwined with it" (p. 10). According to the study most students learn how to perform these expectations without issues. However, some students will act out and force the boundaries. Attachments and rapport are established and set in this stage as well.

Exploring limits and boundaries, including limits to personalities, authority, roles, interaction, conduct, and classroom norms occur in the testing phase (Newberry, 2010). Students may test the limits of "teacher authority, strength, and consistency of the power structure, and the

norms of the school environment" while cycling through this stage (Newberry, 2010, p.1698).

Revisiting the appraisal phase is common after the testing phase of the relationship building.

The planning phase is dedicated to reflecting on interactions, designing future communication methods and participation, and moving the relationship along. Reflection and preparation to move the relationship along is a major focus during this stage. As relationships evolve the teacher in the study was able to use this stage for planning academic tasks and no longer concentrated on moving the relationship. This stage can also be used to lay the groundwork for detachment of the relationship.

Newberry (2010) noted that most teachers have journeyed through all four phases and will return to the agreement phase and remain at that phase with most of the class during the first couple of months of the school year. Newberry (2010) found that "the identification of the phases of relationships, appraisal, testing, agreement, and planning provides new ways for talking about relationships and relationship building in teaching" (p. 1702). When developing an individual relationship, especially one that may be difficult to build and maintain, the four phases need to be revisited often. Relationship building is circular, the phases can be visited in any order and at the same time depending on what the relationship needs at the given time. According to Newberry (2010):

> They can blend and overlap, ebb and flow, progress and digress until the relationship has
> reached a point where both parties involved have achieve a level of comfort and
> understanding. Maintenance of the relationship at this point is relatively effortless and
> perhaps even second nature, a matter of habit. (p. 1702)

Teachers need to receive the time and space to reflect, discuss, and plan as they cycle through the phases with students. Teachers should strive to build and rebuild TSRs with students because

those relationships offer students the greatest possibilities of success in the school environment and beyond the school environment (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015).

Themes of Teacher-Student Relationships

The research studies reviewed on TSRs are connected by similar viewpoints on the structure of the relationship and data collection methods. The identified themes in the structure of the relationship are *closeness and conflict* and *holistic impact*. Longitudinal studies with surveys, and in some cases the use of observations and interviews are the themes for data collection methods.

Closeness and Conflict. Understanding the characteristics that constitute TSRs is a prominent theme when examining TSRs and the effect on students' school experience. The two distinct identified dimensions of TSRs are closeness and conflict (Mason et al., 2017; Sabol & Pianta, 2012). *Closeness* is defined as the amount of warmth and positive affect between the teacher and the child and how comfortable the child is approaching the teacher (Mason et al., 2017; Sabol & Pianta, 2012). *Conflict* is defined as the negative or lack of relationship between the teacher and child and when teacher's perceptions of the TSR are assessed. This factor is strongly related to student outcomes (Sabol & Pianta, 2012). Multiple studies (Mason et al., 2017; Rudasill et al., 2007; Zee & Koomen, 2017) discuss the importance of teacher-student closeness, and teacher-student conflict as a predictor of positive or negative TSRs. Skinner and Belmont's research (as cited in Davis, 2003) found that a teacher's levels of involvement with their students (both actual and perceived by the students) influenced the quality of student's behavioral and emotional engagement in school.

Students having difficult behavior reported having more conflict with their teacher than students who did not have behavior difficulties (Rudasill et al., 2010) which swayed the

relationship in a negative way. TSRs are thought of as a dyadic relationship in which both parties, teacher and student, contribute to the TSR (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015; Zee & Koomen, 2017). The teacher and the student are responsible for the closeness and conflict within the relationship (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015).

Holistic Impact. The research sources that were examined indicate that TSRs impact the school experience for students holistically. They are imperative in influencing student's academic, social, behavioral, and emotional development (Brinkworth et al., 2018; McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015). It is essential that all teachers consider the reasons for students' disruptive behaviors, attachment behaviors and attachment histories, and the implications of their reactions to those behaviors (Mason et al., 2018; McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015).

Several factors contribute to TSRs. Murray and Pianta (2007) organized TSR factors into four broad categories: organizational structures and resources, classroom structures and practices, teacher beliefs, behaviors, and actions, and individual skills for developing prosocial relationships. These factors are further explained below:

- Organizational structures and resources: Overall climates that place a high value on relationships.

- Classroom structures and practices: Clearly stated routines, rules, and consequences.

- Teacher beliefs, behaviors, and actions: High expectations for students and positive feedback.

- Individual skills for developing prosocial relationships: Instruction in self-awareness and management skills, training to use social awareness, and teaching of responsible decision making. (p. 107)

The teaching model of inclusion and planning for inclusion in schools present new challenges for students, teachers, and leaders (Klimaitis & Mullen, 2021; Murray & Pianta, 2007) and requires structural changes from the teacher to develop a deeper understanding of "high-incidence disabilities" student needs (p. 108). The classroom is becoming a complex organization and with multiple populations. Newberry (2010) stated:

> That classroom life now consists of a great variety of students: ESL, gifted, special education and behaviorally challenging, in addition to the regular education students. Each population requires different kinds of instruction. Likewise, each individual student in any given population requires different kinds of relational interactions. (p. 1702)

Data Collection Methods from the Literature

Most of the studies in the research summary table (Appendix A) are longitudinal. These studies were conducted over periods of time using surveys along with observations and/or interviews as another data source in some cases. The Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS) created by Pianta (1988, 1992, 2001) was frequently used in research studies to collect data on TSRs. Researchers (Gallaghera, Kainza, Vernon-Feagansa, & White, 2013; Mason et al., 2017; Pianta & Nimetz, 1991) used a version or section of the STRS as data collection tools. The items on the STRS are detailed below by Pianta & Nimetz (1991):

- The STRS is a 16-item instrument measuring teachers' perceptions of their relationships with particular students.

- Questions assess a teacher's feelings about a child, beliefs about the child's feelings towards him or her, and the teacher's observation of the child's behavior in relation to the teacher.

- All items were written in a 5-point Likert-type scale with the teacher endorsing the extent to which of the items was true of the relationship between himself or herself and the child. (p. 381)

A scale that assesses TSRs holistically was created by Brinkworth et al. (2018). Patterns between TSRs and student outcomes can be identified with this scale. The survey's six-step design, as detailed below, assesses academic outcomes, affect towards school, behavior, and motivation:

1. Literature review: Researchers reviewed relevant literature to understand the range of conceptualizations and operationalizations of TSRs. The review provided the researchers with identification of key characteristics of TSRs, definition, and helped to assemble potential items for consideration.

2. Interviews and focus groups: The researchers conducted open-ended interviews with focus groups to gain an understanding of how prospective respondents conceptualized and understood TSRs.

3. Synthesizing a list of indicators: Information from the interviews and focus groups were compared against the literature review to determine points of overlap, divergence, and disparities in terminology. A synthesized list of indicators was created that represented the key ingredients of TSRs in secondary schools.

4. Developing items: Indicators were developed in the survey items in accordance with the best practices in survey design.

5. Expert review: Survey items were reviewed by experts to ensure items were still in agreement with the researcher's conceptualization of TSRs, to confirm they had not overlooked crucial indicators, and to obtain additional evidence of construct validity.

6. Cognitive pretesting: The researchers employed a cognitive pretesting procedure to ensure the items would be perceived as the researchers planned and that each item triggered appropriate memories as participants formulated responses. (p. 27)

Teaching Students with Emotional Disabilities

Students with EDs are considered some of the most difficult students with disabilities (SWD) to teach. These students are described as aggressive, academic low achievers, and exhibiting disruptive behaviors that cause challenges for school personnel (Sutherland & Singh, 2004). The students are placed in restrictive settings, and their social, academic, and behavior outcomes are lower than other SWD (Leggio & Terras, 2019).

Strategies to Support Students with EDs

It is important for teachers to use research-based strategies to address the needs of students with EDs (Evans, Weiss, & Cullinan, 2012; Mitchell et al., 2019; Zaheer et al., 2019) because their needs are multifaceted (Leggio & Terras, 2019; Zaheer et al., 2019). Students with EDs can experience mental health issues, social skill deficits, removals from school, and numerous academic issues (Leggio & Terras, 2019). Table 1 details research-based strategies that teachers are using to support student with EDs.

Table 1

Strategies used with Students with Emotional Disabilities

Research and Evidence Strategies	Research Study
• Teacher Praise	Mitchell et al., (2019), p. 78
• Precision requests and behavioral momentum	
• Clear instructional methods	
• Positive behavior support	
• Group-oriented contingencies	
• Explicit direct instruction	Evans et al., (2012), pp. 86-97
• Level system	
• Response cost	
• Rules taught and posted	
• Time away	
• Proximity to teacher	
• Verbal reinforce	
• Behavior contract	
• Self-management	
• Token reinforcement	
• Verbal reinforcement	
• Learn about student interest	
• Maintain consistent roles, routines, and expectation	
• Meet one on one	
• Parent/Student conference	
• Modify assignment	
• Peer helper/tutor	
• Social/coping skills	
• Teacher assistant duties	
• Conflict resolution	
• Individual counseling	
• Problem solving	
• Self-esteem	
• Social skills instruction	
• Walk and talk	
• Creating structure and predictability	Zaheer et al., (2019), pp. 119-120
• Promoting positive classroom environments	
• Effective instructional strategies for teaching social and academic skills	
• Assessment and data-based decision making	

Physical Classroom Environment

The physical classroom environment can have an influence on student behavior and success as noted by Earthman and Lemasters (1998), Gaines and Curry (2011), Leggio and Terras (2019), and Zaheer et al. (2019). Students with EDs are included in all classroom settings,

therefore the classroom setting must be prepared to meet the needs of all students (general and special education). Positive behaviors are more prevalent when the classroom is organized, clutter free, and the layout is prepared for the type of instruction (i.e., collaborative groups, direct instruction) that is being presented in the classroom.

In contrast, negative behaviors are more prevalent when the classroom is cluttered and disorganized (Zaheer et al., 2019). Research conducted by Gaines and Curry (2011) explained that color can have an influence on student behavior and the type (cool or warm), and the quantity of color should be considered with designing a classroom. For students with EDs, Leggio and Terras (2019) noted that "creating a homey, consistent environment for student ownership and for creating a calm learning space" is important (p. 8). Students with EDs often experience behavioral outbursts and need time to gain self-control and regulate their emotions. Having a physical space for students to de-escalate in the classroom is of particular importance when they are experiencing severe behaviors (Leggio & Terras, 2019). A physical environment that has minimal distractions, clear access to learning materials, and teacher accessibility provides a sense of structure and predictability for the students (Zaheer et al., 2019).

Implications for Educational Leaders

Implications for educational leaders address two main focus areas (a) fostering and maintaining TSRs relationships with students and between students and teachers and (b) professional develop for teachers, initial and ongoing, to support the needs of students with EDs.

Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL)

The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) 2015 were designed to "respond to the new content of public education as well as to the recent research studying the influence and impact of the school principals on teaching and learning" (Center on Great

Teachers and Leaders, "Introduction," para 2). Educational leadership is much more than just managing a building and keeping the day-to-day operations moving smoothly. The current standards cover multiple areas such as, mission, ethics, equality, curriculum, community of care for students, professional capacity of school personnel, professional community for teachers and staff, meaningful engagement, operations, and school improvement.

The PSEL (2015) applies to all levels of educational leaders including assistant principals, principals, and division leaders. Although, the leadership activities defined under each standard is geared towards building level leadership (National Policy Board of for Educational Administration, 2015). In review of the standards, Standard 5: Community of Care and Support for Students, is the direct connection to the educational leader fostering relationships, specifically the teacher-student relationship (TSR). The standard is cited verbatim below:

Community of Care and Support for Students: Effective educational leaders cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community that promotes the academic success and well-being of each student.

Effective leaders:

- Build and maintain a safe, caring, and healthy school environment that meets that the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of each student.

- Create and sustain a school environment in which each student is known, accepted and valued, trusted and respected, cared for, and encouraged to be an active and responsible member of the school community.

- Provide coherent systems of academic and social supports, services, extracurricular activities, and accommodations to meet the range of learning needs of each student.

- Promote adult-student, student-peer, and school-community relationships that value and support academic learning and positive social and emotional development.

- Cultivate and reinforce student engagement in school and positive student conduct.

- Infuse the school's learning environment with the cultures and languages of the school's community. (p. 13)

Murphy (2016) noted that "creating attachments is key to the work of educators, and leaders need to learn all they can about accomplishing that goal" (p. 132). It is critical for educational leaders to understand and create supportive communities for students because they have a strong impact on student success.

Effective Professional Development

Educational leaders need to provide teachers with effective PD that includes highly effective classroom practices and follow up activities to ensure implementation of the practices (State et al., 2019). Students with EDs have a variety of social, academic, and behavior problems; therefore, it is critical that they receive research/evidence-based supports from skilled teachers to improve their outcomes (Leggio & Terras, 2019; State et al., 2019; Zaheer et al., 2019). Researchers (State et al., 2019) have noted special education teachers of students with EDs are not prepared to address their needs due to not being properly trained or not receiving ongoing PD to improve implementation of practices and student outcomes. These practices are critical to the success of SWD, especially for students with EDs (Leggio & Terras, 2019). Without effective practices being implemented in the classroom, both students and teachers of students with EDs will experience unsuccessful outcomes (State et al., 2019).

Summary

Chapter 2 discussed the following: theories of TSRs, phases of building TSRs, themes of TSRs, policy and governance related to TSRs, teaching students with EDs, and implications for educational leaders. TSRs are critical to the development for all students. The three theories (attachment, self-determination, and ecological systems) associated with TSRs are important to the development of the relationship. Most students with EDs have a disadvantage in building relationships. This can be related to the lack of the ability to form satisfactory relationships but are also likely to encounter a teacher who is not properly prepared to teach them (Leggio & Terras, 2019) due to not having the initial or ongoing PD to properly support them. When developing an individual relationship, especially one that may be difficult to build or maintain, the four relationship phases (appraisal, testing, agreement, and planning) need to be revisited often. The educational leader and the teacher are the main contributors to the success of students with EDs and need to use strategies to support them during their school experiences. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology for the research study. Also, it addresses the methods for data collection and analysis to answer the research questions.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the K–12 teacher-student relationship (TSR) by identifying strategies that teachers use to influence students with emotional disabilities' (EDs') school experiences socially, academically, and behaviorally (SAB). Insight on the influence of school experiences and strategies used were sought from elementary, middle, and high school teachers currently teaching students with EDs. The strategies identified were organized around the four phases (appraisal, testing, agreement, and planning) of building TSRs.

An aim of this study was to add to current literature on TSRs, increase literature on TSRs with students with EDs, and provide educators with strategies to implement to support students with EDs. The acknowledgment and understanding of elementary, middle, and high school teachers' perspectives generated new insights that can benefit students, teachers, and educational leaders. The results of the study can also provide educators at all levels with practical outcomes and strategies to apply to TSRs.

Research Design

This study using qualitative methods was conducted by collecting and analyzing interview data aimed at exploring the K-12 TSR. Strategies used by teachers to influence the social experience, academic experience, and behavioral experience of students at school were identified. The strategies identified were organized around the four phases of TSR building. The results of this study provided scholars with additional research to support the need for teachers to use research/evidence-based strategies when working with student with EDs to help assist the students in achieving better outcomes. Educational leaders and teachers can utilize the identified

strategies when working with students with EDs to help them improve school related outcomes and build TSRs.

Research Design Justification

Interviewing allowed the teacher's voice to be heard and their perspectives of TSRs to be the main focus of the study. This qualitative method of research is used when "a problem or issues need to be explored" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 45). The qualitative interview, as described by Creswell and Poth (2018), is the attempt to understand and uncover the world from the participant's point of view. The research design has multiple characteristics of a qualitative study as presented by Creswell and Poth (2018): researcher as key instrument, multiple methods, complex reasoning through inductive and deductive logic, participants' multiple perspectives and meanings, emergent design, reflexivity, and holistic account. The K-12 TSR was explored and focused on students with EDs and classroom strategies that teachers used to influence school experiences' socially, academically, and behaviorally.

Research Questions

The research questions are:

1. What strategies do teachers who teach populations with emotional disabilities use to influence their students' school experience socially?

2. What strategies do teachers who teach populations with emotional disabilities use to influence their students' school experience academically?

3. What strategies do teachers who teach populations with emotional disabilities use to influence their students' school experience behaviorally?

4. How do the strategies that have been identified align with the four phases (appraisal, testing, agreement, and planning) of building teacher-student relationships?

Study Setting

The setting for the study included two school divisions, one rural and one city, located in southwest Virginia. The selection satisfied the criteria of the study. The rural school division had teachers who taught or previously taught students with an ED in elementary, middle, and high school. The city school division had one teacher who taught students with an ED in elementary school.

Participant Selection and Sample

Participants were chosen using the criterion type of sampling. Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that criterion sampling selects participants that meet a specific criterion. In this study, the criteria for participating teachers consisted of special education teachers teaching or have taught students with EDs. Following Virginia Tech's approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) submission, a conference call was scheduled, or an email was sent to the division superintendent or the division assistant superintendent to request information on the divisions research study procedures. A follow up email was sent to the division or assistant superintendent (see Appendix C) to request permission to conduct the research study. Once approval was granted the researcher communicated with potential participants (see Appendix D) to explain the study and request participation. Recruitment emails were sent to 10 teachers and 9 consented to participate in the study. Interviews were scheduled with the teachers that agreed to be interviewed: six elementary, one middle, and two high school teachers from nine different schools.

Ten teachers of students identified as having an ED were invited to participate in the study and nine agreed. Of the interviewees, eight were female and one was male. The interviewees had a wide range of experience that expanded over the K–12 school grades. The

interviewees' years of experience ranged from first year to veteran with experience teaching in all three levels: elementary (K–5), middle (6–8), and high (9–12).

Research Site

Eight school divisions within the southwest region of Virginia were sent a research request email (four responded) and two school divisions participated in the study. One of the school divisions that responded decided not to participate in the research due to COVID-19 and the added responsibilities placed on their teachers. The other school division did not respond to follow up emails. Of the two divisions that participated, one is in a rural area and the other is in a city surrounded by a rural area.

Data Collection Procedures

The collected data emerged from single one-on-one interviews with teachers. The interviewees reported the teacher's perspective on the questions asked. The interviews lasted from 17–60 minutes via an electronic format (Zoom) and by way of phone for one interview, were audio-recorded, and followed the Teacher Strategy Interview Protocol (see Appendix F). The consent form (see Appendix E), the Teacher Strategy Interview Protocol, Research Study Information Sheet, and a Zoom link were sent to participants in advance of the interview. During each interview, the researcher took field notes and probed the interviewee as needed to help understand questions and/or assist with fully answering the questions.

Instrument Design and Validation

A vital responsibility of the researcher when conducting qualitative research is "to attempt to access the thoughts and feelings of study participants" (Sutton & Austin, 2015, p. 226). Interview questions were chosen to allow those conditions described above to develop

during the interview. Creswell and Poth (2018) detailed an interview protocol process that was followed for this study:

- Determine the research questions that will be answered by the interviewees.

- Identify interviewees who can best address these questions based on one of the purposeful sampling procedures.

- Distinguish the type of interview by determining what mode is practical and what interactions will net the most useful information to address research questions.

- Collect data using adequate recording procedures when conducting one-on-one or focus group interviews.

- Design and use an interview protocol or interview guide.

- Refine the interview questions and the procedures through pilot testing.

- Locate a distraction-free place for conducting the interview.

- Obtain consent from the interviewee to participate in the study by completing a consent form approved by the human relations review board (Appendix E).

- As an interviewer, follow good interview procedures (Appendices E, F, and G).

- Decide transcription logistics ahead of time.

The interview questions in the Teacher Strategy Interview Protocol were in response to the literature reviewed. Table 2 shows the relationship between the interview questions and the literature reviewed.

Table 2

Relationship Between Interview Questions and Literature

Interview Questions	Source(s)	Relationship
1. Icebreaker: Tell me a little bit about what you do, what level you teach, how many years of experience you have, and who you are.	Standard interview question	Standard interview question
2. What strategies do you use when working with students with emotional disabilities to address social situations?	Evans et al. (2012); Mitchell et al. (2019) Zaheer et al. (2019)	It is important for teachers to use research-based strategies to address the needs of students with EDs because their needs are multifaceted.
3. What strategies do you use when working with students with emotional disabilities to address academic situations?	Leggio & Terras (2019); State et al. (2019); Zaheer et al. (2019)	Students with EDs have a variety of social, academic, and behavior problems; therefore, it is critical that they receive research/evidence-based supports from skilled teachers to improve their outcomes.
4. What strategies do you use when working with students with emotional disabilities to address behavioral situations?	Leggio & Terras (2019)	These practices are critical to the success of SWD, especially for students with EDs. Students with EDs can experience mental health issues, social skill deficits, removals from school, and numerous academic issues.
	State et al. (2019)	Without effective practices being implemented in the classroom, both students and teachers of students with EDs will experience unsuccessful outcomes.
5. How do you think the teacher-student relationship is connected with the strategies you described (socially/academically/behaviorally)?	McGrath & Van Bergan (2014); Newberry (2010)	TSRs can affect behavior, academic, and other domains of a student's school experience.
	Davis (2003)	The quality of a TSR can influence social and cognitive development children. The characteristics of the TSR can control the school experience.
	Brinkworth et al. (2018); McGrath & Van Bergen (2015)	TSRs are imperative in influencing student's academic, social, behavioral, and emotional development.

Relationship Between Interview Questions and Literature *(cont.)*

Interview Questions	Source(s)	Relationship
6. How do you think the physical classroom environment is connected with the strategies you described (socially/academically/behaviorally) and teacher-student relationships?	Gaines &Curry (2011), Leggio &Terras (2019), and Zaheer et al. (2019)	The physical classroom environment can have an impact on student behavior and success.
	Leggio & Terras (2019)	For students with ED "creating a homey, consistent environment for student ownership and for creating a calm learning space" is important (p.8).
7. What message would you like to give to school administrations related to the strategies you described when working with students with emotional disabilities?	Center on Great Teacher and Leaders (2016)	PSEL), Standard 5: Community of Care and Support for Students, is a direct connection to the educational leader fostering relationships, specifically the TSR.
	Murphy (2016)	"Creating attachments is key to the work of educators, and leaders need to learn all they can about accomplishing that goal" (p. 132).
	State et al., (2019)	Educational leaders need to provide teachers with effective professional development (PD) that includes highly effective classroom practices and follow up activities to ensure implementation of the practices.
8. Is there anything else you would like to add?	Standard interview question	Standard interview question

To ensure alignment of the research questions and interview questions to the study and to refine the interview process the researcher had four experts (two Virginia Tech faculty members, one elementary principal, and one teacher of students with EDs) in special education review the protocol and procedures. Each expert provided feedback that was taken into consideration when finalizing the interview process. In addition to reviewing the interview questions and procedures, alignment was established between the interview questions and research questions (Table 3).

Table 3

Alignment of Research Questions and Interview Questions

Research Questions	Coordinating Interview Questions
1. What strategies do teachers who teach populations with emotional disabilities use to influence their students' school experience socially?	2. What strategies do you use when working with students with emotional disabilities to address social situations? 6. How do you think the physical classroom environment is connected with the strategies you described (socially/academically/behaviorally) and teacher-student relationships? 7. What message would you like to give to school administrators related to the strategies you described when working with students with emotional disabilities? 8. Is there anything else you would like to add?
2. What strategies do teachers who teach populations with emotional disabilities use to influence their students' school experience academically?	3. What strategies do you use when working with students with emotional disabilities to address academic situations? 6. How do you think the physical classroom environment is connected with the strategies you described (socially/academically/behaviorally) and teacher-student relationships? 7. What message would you like to give to school administrators related to the strategies you described when working with students with emotional disabilities? 8. Is there anything else you would like to add?
3. What strategies do teachers who teach populations with emotional disabilities use to influence their students' school experience behaviorally?	4. What strategies do you use when working with students with emotional disabilities to address behavioral situations 6. How do you think the physical classroom environment is connected with the strategies you described (socially/academically/behaviorally) and teacher-student relationships? 7. What message would you like to give to school administrators related to the strategies you described when working with students with emotional disabilities? 8. Is there anything else you would like to add?
4. How do the strategies that have been identified align with the four phases (appraisal, testing, agreement, and planning) of building teacher-student relationships?	2. What strategies do you use when working with students with emotional disabilities to address social situations? 3. What strategies do you use when working with students with emotional disabilities to address academic situations? 4. What strategies do you use when working with students with emotional disabilities to address behavioral situations? 5. How do you think the teacher-student relationship is connected with the strategies you described (socially/academically/behaviorally)? 7. What message would you like to give to school administrators related to strategies when working with students with emotional disabilities? 8. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Data Treatment and Management

The researcher was the only person with access to the collected data. All recordings of interviews, transcriptions of interviews, and the summary data spreadsheet was stored on the researcher's password-protected laptop. All other materials, such as field notes and printed transcriptions, were stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home. Interviewees were assigned a number to keep their identity private due to the demographic question in the interview protocol. All materials were kept upon successful completion of the dissertation defense and destroyed in accordance with IRB procedures.

Data Analysis

Qualitative research focuses on data from open-ended and conversational communication. Elementary, middle, and high school teachers participated in a single, one-on-one interview at a convenient time for the interviewee. The interviews were conducted via an electronic format (Zoom). A link was sent to participants in advance. All interviews were audio-recorded on two devices to combat unforeseen technology issues. Field notes were taken during each interview.

According to Sutton and Austin (2015), field notes can provide "important context to the interpretation" (p. 227) of the recording and remind the researcher of situational factors while analyzing the data. An interview protocol was followed and the audio-recordings of the interviews were transcribed. Upon receiving the transcribed interview, the transcription was sent to the participant for verification (see Appendix G). Once approved by the participant, analysis of the transcribed interview began. The transcriptions were reviewed (making notes, coding, and discovering overarching themes) and field notes were used to add context to the interviews.

Notes, codes, and themes were organized in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. The researcher followed the data analysis process outlined by Creswell and Poth (2018) as next described.

Managing and Organizing the Data

All data were placed in a "working" folder on the researcher' laptop named "DissResearch." Each interviewee was assigned a number and all materials such as field notes and transcribed interviews were placed in a folder labeled with the interviewee's assigned number. The number kept the identity of the interviewee anonymous due to the icebreaker question on the Teacher Strategy Interview Protocol that had the potential to produce demographic information from the interviewee. A data summary spreadsheet was created in Microsoft Excel to organize and categorize the data from the transcribed interview responses. Interview questions were made into a row heading and each column represented a participant.

Reading and Memoing Emergent Ideas

Once transcripts were verified, the researcher read the transcripts, took notes, and compared the field notes with the corresponding transcripts to code and develop overarching themes from each of the interviews. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) stated that team coding provides clarity and is a way to check for reliability. To obtain reliability within the coding and themes, a doctoral graduate (Virginia Tech's Educational Leadership and Policy Studies program) who had completed a qualitative dissertation reviewed a sample set of data and coded separately from the researcher. The similarities and differences of the codes and themes were compared on the sample data set. Interview transcripts were read multiple times to get a sense of the interview prior to breaking it down into parts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher took notes on the transcribed interviews and reviewed field notes to record the

development of ideas from the analyzing of data. All ideas were entered into the data summary spreadsheet.

Describing and Classifying Codes Into Themes

Deductive and inductive coding methods were used to form codes. Deductive coding, as described by Miles et al. (2014), is a list of codes that are predetermined before beginning the research study. The codes are produced "from the literature review, conceptual framework, research questions, hypothesis, problem areas, and/or key variables that researcher brings to the study" (p. 74). Codes are labels that assign symbolic meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study.

The researcher used *in vivo* coding because it is used in studies "that prioritize and honor the participant's voice" and it "uses words or short phrases from the participant's own language in the data record as codes" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 65). The codes for *school experience* based on research may be derived from and include academic, social, behavior, peer relationships, student perceptions, teacher role, and power struggles. The codes for *TSR* based on research may be derived from and include impact, influence, trust, attach, caring, and safe. The codes for *teacher strategies* based on research may be derived from and include physical environment, effective instruction methods, self-management, positive behavioral supports, coping skills, and teacher praise. The codes for *phases of TSRs* based on research may be derived from and include appraisal, testing, agreement, planning, building, and maintaining.

The researcher used inductive coding to allow codes to emerge as the data was being analyzed along with a starting code list. By using inductive coding, the researcher did not have to fit all information into the predetermined codes. The codes were reviewed on the data summary spreadsheet for themes from the research. Themes are common ideas from large units of data that

describe what the data are about or mean (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Miles et al., 2014). The themes were organized on the data summary spreadsheet and color-coded to locate each theme within the data table. Based on the literature review, themes may be derived from and include closeness and conflict, holistic impact, research/evidence-based strategies, and positive classroom environment.

The notes and codes from the analysis of the research were organized in the data summary spreadsheet created using Microsoft Excel. Rows contained the interview questions and the columns represented a participant. The collecting of data, selecting interviewees, conducting interviews, and analyzing data were solely completed by the researcher.

Developing and Assessing Interpretations

The data summary spreadsheet was reviewed along with transcripts and field notes to formulate commonalties into themes from the data. Coloring coding was used as a tool to help assess the data. Interpretations and generalizations were made to complete the data analysis and answer the research questions.

Representing and Visualizing the Data

The analysis of the nine interviewees' responses to the research questions are presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 4 includes charts and tables where appropriate to visually represent the data. Findings, summary, and conclusions are discussed in Chapter 5.

Summary

Chapter 3 is an overview of the methodology for the research study. It detailed the purpose of the study, study setting, selection of participants, data collection procedures, instrument design and validation, data treatment and management, and data analysis. By

interviewing teachers, the researcher obtained their perspectives of the research topic. Chapter 4

summarizes the analysis of the nine interviewees' responses to the research questions.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the K–12 teacher-student relationship (TSR) by identifying strategies that teachers use to influence students with emotional disabilities' (EDs') school experiences socially, academically, and behaviorally (SAB). Insight on the influence of school experiences and strategies used were sought from elementary, middle, and high school teachers currently teaching students with EDs. The strategies identified were organized around the four phases (appraisal, testing, agreement, and planning) of building TSRs.

The study was guided by these research questions:

1. What strategies do teachers of students with emotional disabilities use to develop students' social skills?

2. What strategies do teachers of students with emotional disabilities use to develop students' academic skills?

3. What strategies do teachers of students with emotional disabilities use to develop students' behavioral skills?

4. How do the strategies that have been identified align with the four phases (appraisal, testing, agreement, and planning) of building teacher-student relationships?

Due to COVID-19 all nine interviews were conducted on the Zoom electronic platform and transcribed using the Zoom transcription feature. The researcher emailed the transcribed interview to interviewees for review and verification. After receiving verification from the interviewees, the researcher organized the data into an Excel spreadsheet and began the data coding. The questions, responses, and field notes were aligned in the Excel spreadsheet to organize the data. After all data were entered into the Excel spreadsheet, the researcher used deductive and inductive methods to code the data and find common themes. All codes and

themes were added to the Excel spreadsheet. To ensure coder reliability, two interview

transcriptions were shared with a qualitative doctoral researcher who independently coded the

interviews prior to the data analysis being completed by the researcher. Table 4 shows sample

inter-rater codes compared to the researcher codes.

Table 4

Sample Inter-Rater Coding Compared to the Researcher Coding

Interview Question	Researcher Codes	Inter-Rater Codes
Social Situations	Social Stories Real-Life Situations Social Skills - IEP	Social Stories with Academics Real-Life Social Skills Related to IEP
Behavioral Challenges	Teacher Strategy – Reading of Positive Affirmations Strategy – Use of Sensory Items Support – Behavior Invention Plan (BIP)	Teacher Praise – Positive Affirmation Effective Instructional Methods-Sensory/things Positive Behavior Support - BIP
Academic Challenges	Building Relationships Breaks During Instruction Meet Basic Needs of Students then Academics	Instructional Method – Building Relationships Behavioral Supports – Take Breaks Instructional Method – Meet Emotional and Physical Need First and Academic 2nd
TSR Connected with Strategies	Build Relationships – Get to know the student Have to have Trust Relationships are Vital	Build Relationships - Get to know the student interest Build Trust Relationships are Vital Must Relate to Student
Physical Classroom Environment	Comfortable – Feel like home Safe Space – Welcomed Sense of belonging Apart of the classroom	Home Environment Welcoming Physical Environment Students Feeling Safe Belongingness/Sense of Belonging
Advice or Recommendation to School Administrators	Understanding - Every day is a new day Support teachers Build an Administrator Student Relationship (ASR) – Appraisal Phase, Planning Phase	New Day Mindset Support Teachers by Recognize difficulty of job Administrators need to build – student admin relationships (trust, attach, caring, safe)

Key strategies and common themes were identified in the transcription data. The current chapter details the findings from each interview question. Some interviewee quotes were edited for clarification and to correct speech disfluencies (*so*, *um*, *you know* and *yes ma'am*).

Analysis of Research Questions

Interview Question 1. *Icebreaker: Tell me a little about what you do, what level you teach, how many years of experience you have, and who you are.*

Years of teaching experience that teacher interviewees have had teaching students with ED are recorded in Table 5.

Table 5

Interviewees Years Teaching ED, Total Years, and Grade Level

Interviewee	Years Teaching ED	Total Years Teaching	Grade Level
1	First Year	First Year	Middle (6–8)
2	First Year	First Year	Elementary (K–5)
3	2	2	Elementary (K–5)
4	3	7	Elementary (K–5)
5	4	8	High School (9–12)
6	Not Given	Not Given	High School (9–12)
7	15	15	Elementary (K–5)
8	First Year	First Year	Elementary (K–5)
9	13	13	Elementary (K–5)

Interviewees' race consisted of four African American teachers and five White teachers this information was not asked explicitly although it was known through observation and/or prior association.

Interviewee 1 was a first-year teacher at the middle school level. Before becoming a teacher, she was a behavior specialist and is completing the certification to be a board-certified behavior analyst. As a behavior specialist, Interviewee 1 would go into classrooms and help teachers develop strategies, figure out the function of behaviors, observe, and offer training to teachers and parents. This position did not require her to work with the students on academics.

However, she would work on social skills with the students in small groups. She felt that "being on the other side of the classroom door" would help her future career.

Interviewee 2 was a first-year elementary teacher who had one year of experience as a paraprofessional in the ED classroom. All grade levels are represented in her classroom this year. Interviewee 3 was a second-year teacher at the elementary school level. She had taught almost every grade over the 2 years due to her classroom being self-contained and at the same elementary school. Her "second year is a little different than the first with everything that's going on."

Interviewee 4 was a paraprofessional in an ED classroom for 4 years before becoming the teacher in that classroom for 3 years. She had 7 years of experience with students identified as having an ED. She was completing her first year as a Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) teacher. Although she was enjoying her new students, she stated that she misses her students who have an ED and having a homeroom setting.

Interviewee 5 taught high school and had 4 years of experience at that level. The students in her self-contained classroom were pursuing the Applied Studies diploma because they were unable pass the Standards of Learning (SOL) tests or because their behaviors disrupted the classroom. Her caseload consisted of students identified as having Other Health Impairments (OHI) and ED. She had recently received her master's degree in special education general curriculum. Before that, she was a music psychology student. Prior to teaching high school, she taught self-contained SLD and Intellectually Delayed (ID) students for 4 years. She has been married for 10 years and had three children.

Interviewee 6 had "been teaching for quite a while" and said, "I do love my job and I love my students very much." She has taught students identified as having an ED her entire teaching career.

Interviewee 7 had 15 years of experience teaching students with an ED. She taught students at the elementary level. Her students can have "multiple labels," which include OHI, ID, SLD, and autism.

Interviewee 8 was a first-year teacher at the elementary school level. Prior to becoming a teacher, she retired from the military with almost 23 years of service. Currently she taught fifth, fourth, and kindergarten students in a self-contained classroom.

Interviewee 9 had 13 years of experience. He started his career as a paraprofessional and later completed his degree in Special Education and began teaching students identified as having an ED. Currently, he was teaching students on the elementary level but has experience teaching middle and high school students as well. He has been in his current division for the majority of his career and described himself as "an avid educator, I believe in my students that they can achieve great things and just, the overall go getter."

Interview Question 2. *What strategies do you use when working with students with emotional disabilities to address social situations?*

All nine interviewees shared the strategies that they use to address social situations in their classrooms. The common themes that emerged from the data were use of real-life situations (5 out of 9), use of social stories/teaching social skills (5 out of 9), and building relationships (knowing your students; 4 out of 9). Table 6 illustrates abbreviated strategies provided by each interviewee.

Table 6

Strategies Used to Address Social Situations

Strategies to Use	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Use of Real-life Situations	X	X	X	X					X
Use Social stories/Teaching Social Skills		X	X	X			X		X
Building Relationships (knowing your students)			X		X	X			X
Group Play – Peer Work	X								
Modeling Behaviors							X		
Relate to IEP		X							
Time Frame				X					
Relate to Your Own Experience									X
Explanation of Rules/Expectations							X		X
Ice Breaker Meeting								X	
Give Choices	X								
Role Play/Modeling						X	X		

The use of real-life situations consists of using situations as they happen. Teachers assist the students through those situations with communication and prompting to help the student make choices to improve a similar situation in the future. Interviewee 1 stated, "It's just going through every day with them at school and using certain situations or scenarios as teaching moments." Interviewee 9 described it as "sometimes you have to use vicarious experience, you have to work in whatever the situation is, you have to let it present itself." The interviewees explained use of the social stories/teaching social skills training as teaching the student what to do and how to act in social situations. Interviewee 7 focused on teaching the students social rules or expectations and skills before the social situation occur. Interviewee 2 incorporated the social stories into academics and based them on the student's individual educational plan (IEP).

Building relationships with students for the interviewees involved creating a connection and knowing your students—understanding triggers, how they learn, their likes/dislikes, letting your student know you care, and remembering each student is an individual. "Establishing that student-teacher relationship that's very effective and with them building that trust in me, getting to know me, and seeing that I do care" is how Interviewee 6 explained the effectiveness of the

strategy on social situations. Interviewee 9 stated, "You have to know that individual, you have to know their heart" when discussing the importance of approaching situations. Interviewee 5 shared that getting to know your students "that's my first thing" and "once you have that connection," a teacher can understand where students are coming from in social situations.

Interview Question 3. *What strategies do you use when working with students with emotional disabilities to address behavioral challenges?*

Teachers' responses were related to their experiences when working with students at their current level of teaching. The data analysis noted that certain strategies shared were not inclusive to one school level. For example, providing students with incentives to reach behavior goals was shared by elementary level and high school level interviewees. Although, there were some differences between each school level when addressing behavior challenges. At the elementary level there was an emphasis on personal relationships and providing support once the behavior had escalated. The middle school level discussed the importance of completing a Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) to understand the cause of the behavior and use that information to determine strategies to address the behavior. Communication was of importance at the high school level in many forms, for example, providing feedback, helping students set goals, and verbal praise. Table 7 displays summarized strategies used by the interviewees when addressing behavioral challenges.

Table 7

Strategies Used to Address Behavioral Challenges

Interviewee	Strategies Used to Address Behavior Challenges
1	• Complete Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) • Determine strategies to address the behavior
2	• Safe space/cool down corner • Read positive affirmations with students • Use of sensory items • Calm down techniques • Self–regulation strategies
3	• Wait time • Change of environment • Work on expressing feelings with words • De-scalation techniques • Role play behaviors • Allow student to express behaviors • Offer students behaviors – counseling • Listening
4	• Consistent rules/expectations • Strict routine • Students knowing expectations • Review behavior expectations daily 1st – 2nd week of school • Parent/Student/Teacher Contract
5	• Understand the why of the behavior • Help the student set goals • Provide them steps to reach goals • Incentives • Communicating with students
6	• Providing positive feedback and reinforcement to students that are behaving • Verbal praise • Praise/build them up • Praise/address behaviors • Be consistent • Classroom behavior plan
7	• Clear and concise expectations • Consistency with positive reinforcements and consequences • Regular communication with family members • Be flexible • Respond to student – not behavior • Student goals • Verbal/Visual reminders of behaviors • Individual basis
8	• Relationship with parents • Putting students in a position of power (classroom jobs) – builds confidence and social emotional skills • Incentive
9	• Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) – address individual student needs • Incentive • Allow student to express behavior • Address the antecedent that caused the behavior

Recurring strategies noted by multiple interviewees were combined into themes to include communication/listening (9 out of 9), understanding the "why" of the behavior (4 out of 9), and behavior techniques are on an individual bases (4 out of 9). All interviewees expressed that communication and listening in some format was an essential strategy in addressing behaviors. Examples include discussing the behavior with your students during or after the behavior challenge, talking to students to know what incentives they enjoy, communicating with parents about the behavior, and explaining rules and expectations to students. Interviewee 3 worked on getting the students to express their feelings with words. Interviewee 4 explained that on back-to-school night, a parent/student/teacher contract is established and referred to as needed during the school year. Interviewee 9 expressed that "every behavior has a reason."

Interview Question 4. *What strategies do you use when working with students with emotional disabilities to address academic challenges?*

Eight out of nine interviewees shared a collective strategy—meeting them where they are academically—when addressing academic challenges with students. The interviewees explained this as teaching the student where they are instructionally, rather than on grade level, indicating that most students with an ED have academic gaps that must be addressed before they can learn grade level material. Interviewee 4 said she had students that missed class time due to suspensions because of behaviors. A similar viewpoint was shared by Interviewee 7 when explaining some of the strategies that she uses. She mentioned that "students with emotional disabilities, oftentimes have lots of academic gaps, due to their problematic behaviors." Teaching the students where they are can build confidence, lower frustration, and increase productivity for the students according to the interviewees. Interviewee 5 shared, "I like to start on their level,

because if I build on what they already know, it builds confidence and they're willing to learn a little bit more as time goes on." Interviewee 8 stated:

It's all about, building confidence, start at the lower level in learning (that same task) and then you just build on it gradually…But if you just gradually, build, start at the very basic, we will begin to see our student strive in confidence and desire to learn, instead of becoming frustrated, and not wanting to try.

Support of basic needs (4 out of 9) was also a common shared strategy. The interviewees who shared this strategy expressed that to be able to teach their students, they needed to ensure that their basic needs were met. Basic needs could include emotional, behavioral, social, and physical needs. Interviewee 2 centered this strategy around building relationships with her students to meet the students' emotional and physical needs to ensure that academics do not "fall short." Table 8 details strategies shared by interviewees when addressing academic challenges.

Table 8

Strategies Used to Address Academic Challenges

Strategies to Use	1	2	3	4	7	8	9
Address situation	X						
Use or adjust IEP		X	X			X	
Building relationships		X					X
Meeting basic needs		X	X	X	X		
Break/chunk work		X			X		
Allow breaks		X					
Teach on student level and build up			X	X	X	X	X
Lessening assignments					X		
Choice of assignments					X		
Be flexible						X	

The data analysis noted that the strategies that elementary and middle school interviewees used to address academic challenges differed from high school interviewees. Table 9 details high school level strategies shared by interviewees.

Table 9

High School Level Strategies Used to Address Academic Challenges

Strategies	Interviewee 5	Interviewee 6
Teach on student level and build up	X	X
Involve general education teacher	X	X
Extra assistance during the school day		X
Bi-weekly updates from general education teacher		X
Check grade system		X
After school office hours		X
Communication with parents		X
Help student build self-advocacy skills		X
Rewards		X

Interview Question 5. *How do you think the teacher-student relationship is connected with the strategies you described (socially/behaviorally/academically)?*

A positive TSR is fundamental in making the strategies successful, according to eight out of the nine interviewees. Interviewee 7 explained that to connect all the strategies together a teacher must have a "quality relationship" with the students. "If you don't have that relationship with them the strategies won't work because nobody's going to receive from someone they don't trust," shared Interviewee 9. Interviewees 4 and 7 agreed that the students needed to trust their teachers so that the students would express their feelings and emotions to them. Within the relationship, Interviewees 2, 6, and 8 discussed how important it is for the students to know that the teacher cares for them. Interviewee 1 shared that the relationship is the "biggest thing," and you must "pair" with your student at the start of each day or session.

Interviewees 3, 4, and 6 highlighted the need to understand that some students come into their classrooms with negative expectations due to past experiences. Interviewee 4 discussed how the students have multiple adults entering and leaving their lives and that they need a constant person. She explained that a teacher must "detach" and continue working with that

student after an incident occurs. Her definition of "detach" involved not holding on to the behaviors from earlier. If the student accepts responsibility for their behavior during the incident, then it is time to move on. Interviewee 3 explained that students are aware of why they are coming to or are in "an emotional disabilities classroom" and they are "expecting to be yelled at or talked down to." In her opinion, "if you don't have the ability to grow with them, then they won't grow…the relationship you have, you have to have a forgiving relationship with your students in this classroom." She described the idea of being able to learn from your students as "if you don't have the ability to grow with them, then they won't grow."

Interviewees 1, 2, and 8 shared strategies that they use to build relationships with their students. Table 10 summarizes those strategies.

Table 10

Strategies Used For Building Relationships

Interviewee	Strategies Used
1	• Completing an Interest Survey Inventory • Getting to know the student before pushing academics • Doing an activity that the student enjoys together after academics is complete
2	• Asking "get to know you" questions • Letting students ask "get to know you" questions • Schools core values from PBIS • Class discussions
8	• Have student introduce themselves – likes/dislikes • Giving treats based on student's likes and dislikes • Learning their triggers • Telling the students about you

Interview Question 6*. How do you think the physical classroom environment is connected with the strategies you described (socially/academically/behaviorally) and teacher-student relationships?*

The interviewees described the physical classroom environment as an entity with two parts: the classroom setup (9 out of 9) and emotional support (7 out 9). Both have an impact on strategies socially, academically, and behaviorally (SAB; 6 out of 9) and are connected to TSRs (7 out of 9). Examples of the classroom setup ranged from placement of furniture to maximize the structure of the classroom environment to allowing students to build cozy personal spaces throughout the classroom. Interviewee 8 discussed arranging the classroom in a way that the students and teachers are always visible to each other and where one can always travel safely around the classroom. Interviewee 6 discussed being involved in scheduling classes for her students to ensure they are not placed in unstructured environments that they are not ready to handle. Interviewee 5 shared that she likes to add books and other items related to her students' cultures to the classroom. Table 11 details the shortened responses shared from interviewees on classroom setup.

Table 11

Physical Classroom Environment – Classroom Setup

Interviewee	Physical Classroom Environment – Classroom Setup
1	• Personal calming kit • Personal calm down area
2	• Color • Comfortable areas • Bean bag chairs • Reading areas
3	• Limited distractions • Limited hands-on learning materials • Supplying learning materials • Use of centers/rotations/moving around
4	• Declutter/make inviting • Non stimulating • Personal corners/areas
5	• Books/items that pertain to cultures of the students
6	• Structured/controlled environment
7	• Calming areas • Use of dividers to separate students • Safe places for students to go in case of incident in classroom • Safe zones within classroom • Moving of furniture quickly • Proximity of seating to teacher/paraprofessional
8	• Classroom structure • Limit triggers • Allowing student space/seating is not close together • Classroom arrangement—allow for teachers and students to view each other • Safety travel around classroom
9	• Give student their own personal space

Seven out of nine interviewees discussed that as the teacher of the classroom, they were

to establish an environment that provided emotional support to their students. The emotional

support is attached to multiple feelings that the interviewees shared that they were to provide

and/or foster within the classroom environment for the students. Examples of emotional support

included a sense of belonging, security, classroom ownership, and feeling of being supported.

Table 12 details the responses shared from interviewees on emotional support.

Table 12

Physical Classroom Environment – Emotional Support

Interviewee	Physical Classroom Environment – Feelings
2	"that kind of goes back to the comfortable and making them feel welcomed" "making it feel like home" "learn your students"
4	"I always get the kids involved"
5	"the environment I think is open I have different races…we respect everyone, and I think they learn from each other" "helps with behavior because they understand where the teacher is coming from" "academically I think is broadens the horizon" "behavior, towards the teacher I would say they have more understanding"
7	"I have to provide an environment that is nurturing" "where they feel security and they feel safe" "I have to provide an educational environment that provides them with a setting that they can foster relationships with people…that they feel accomplished in" "if an environment that makes a student feel welcomed and safe and loved and liked and supported, then it's easier for me to do my job of actually educating them" "Being open and consistent" "classroom culture of openness and nurturing and caring, but at the same time firmness and with expectation"
8	"atmosphere should speak loud that here you are in safe space and we mean business and you're coming to learn" "the classroom should be structured in a such a way, where students are provoked to learn, because of the love and caring they feel in the atmosphere"
9	"you want them to feel that this is their safe space" "their go to that this is their space" "you want them to feel like they are part of it" "you want them to feel safe here" "this is a safe zone, even when they have those roller coaster moments you want them to feel comfortable enough to know that" "you want them to feel apart and let them make decisions in the classroom" "this is their classroom" "this is their environment"

Interview Question 7. *What advice or recommendations would you like to give to school*

administrators related to the strategies you described when working with the students with

emotional disabilities?

Eight out of nine interviewees shared advice or recommendations for administration

based on their experiences with administration. Table 13 summarizes each interviewee's

response.

Table 13

Interviewees Advice or Recommendations for Administrators

Interviewee	Advice or Recommendations for Administrators
1	• Consistency • Update teachers on strategies they are using to ensure everyone is on the "same page"
2	• Understand that every day is new day • Work with the teachers • Be flexible with daily changes • Build an "administration student relationship." - Be interactive with the students.
4	• Understand what is going on before getting involved in the situation. - Have a "clear protocol" to enter a situation.
5	• Remember that a student's background or culture impacts what we receive at school.
6	• Allow teachers to assist with disciplinary issues.
7	• Students need to know they are "loved and in a safe situation" before we can teach them. • Expectations need to be more realistic. • More understanding—see the "whole picture." • "We can't always push academics in the same way that a regular ed teacher does." • "We are special education teachers for a reason…because are students are special education and they would not have an IEP if they could function like every other regular ed student."
8	• Make sure IEPs are accurate and remember IEPs are legal documents. • Read Special Education Program regulations—understanding of special education • Build relationships with special education students — "get to know them and their names."
9	• Support and talk to teachers. • "Let your people know you're there for them."

Interviewee 3 shared that her school, while a great place to work, does constantly question her about teaching students who have EDs. She felt that just because her students have "bad days" does not mean they are bad kids. She said that she loves what she does and feels that her students should not have to "prove themselves that much more" because they are in her classroom. She expressed that regular education classrooms "need to have a little bit more patience and learn the wait method."

Interview Question 8. *Is there anything else you would like to add?*

Five of the nine interviewees had additional information that they wanted to share. Interviewee 8 wanted to share that school administrators needed to foster a relationship with students with special needs just like they do with other students. She explained that "they also have the right for dignity, respect, and education just like everybody else, because they are somebody." Similarly, interviewee 7 discussed that her students deserve to have the same thing that everybody else has in relation to receiving teaching materials and student materials. "Having access to the same regular academic material that regular ed teachers have would just be nice." Also, she stated having a curriculum adopted by her school division to assist with helping students recognize their behaviors and emotions would be helpful.

Interviewee 6 expressed her concerns with student discipline. She understood that there were protocols administrators had to follow pertaining to discipline but when it was possible, they should allow teachers who have had "success in working with the students" assist with discipline issues. Interviewee 3 expressed that ED is a growing field, and that more awareness needs to be shown towards it. "Sometimes it's easier to call a kid bad than to figure out what's behind it." She felt that people need to be more compassionate. Interviewee 4 said that she misses the students she taught with an ED and felt that teaching this population kept her in the

field. However, she was ready for a change and she enjoys seeing her former students in classrooms.

Findings for the Research Questions

In this section, findings for the research questions are discussed. The questions were:

1. What strategies do teachers who teach populations with emotional disabilities use to influence their students' school experience socially?

2. What strategies do teachers who teach populations with emotional disabilities use to influence their students' school experience academically?

3. What strategies do teachers who teach populations with emotional disabilities use to influence their students' school experience behaviorally?

4. How do the strategies that have been identified align with the four phases (appraisal, testing, agreement, and planning) of building teacher-student relationships?

Six findings emerged from the data analysis regarding strategies that teachers who teach populations with EDs use to influence their students' school experience SAB. Additionally, four findings were determined in relation to the four phases (appraisal, testing, agreement, and planning) of building TSRs. Each finding is discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

The data analysis identified five key strategies that influence students' school experience socially, five key strategies that influence students' school experience academically, and eight key strategies that influence students' school experience behaviorally. The data analysis produced 18 key strategies to be organized around the four phases (appraisal, testing, agreement, and planning) of building teacher-student relationships as shown in Table 18. A strategy was identified as key if over 50% of the interviewees referenced the strategy more than eight times during the interview. A word count frequency is included to note the level of frequency of each

strategy as it was discussed by the interviewees or inferred by the researcher. Also, a content analysis was completed on the text from the interviews and field notes. A combination of statements by the interviewees and inferences made by the researcher created the word count frequencies. Tables 14, 15, and 16 list strategies used by the teachers to influence school experience for students SAB. The key strategies are highlighted within each table and examples of supporting data are included.

Table 14

Strategies Used by Teachers to Influence School Experience for Students Socially

Social Strategy (Actual or Inferred) by Interviewee	Interviewees	Strategy Word/ Phrase Count	Examples
Building Relationships (knowing your students)	8	40	"first you got to get to know your kid that's my first thing"
Use of Real-life situations	8	38	"natural environmental teaching, it's just going through every day with them at school and using certain situations or scenarios as teaching moments"
Positive Classroom Environment	6	33	"if an environment makes a student feel welcomed and safe and loved and liked and supported, then it's easier for me to do my job of actually educating them"
Use Social stories/Teaching Social Skills/Curriculum	6	23	"there or times that you may incorporate a social story that could help them in the situation or circumstance"
Open Communication Between Student and Teacher	7	20	"we're going to talk about it, and we are going to move forward"
Group Play – Peer work	1	1	"group play, playing games with the kids and maybe their peers, just to work on turn taking"
Role Play/ Modeling Behaviors	4	10	"what has been the most effective has been role play and even though that particular student may not always participate in the role play but seeing us demonstrate it in class and role play the situations then that has been very effective"
Relate to IEP	3	8	"I do base the social skills that I teach off their IEP"
Address Incident Immediately	2	3	"kind of debrief with them immediately when it happened"
Relate to your own Experience	2	4	"as a teacher, I will relate my own life experiences to some of my students"
Explanation of Rules/Expectations	2	10	"we do try to explain the rules behind social situations and not just tell them how to act in a social situation"
Ice Breaker Meeting	1	1	"we afford our students, one at a time to tell what's going on with them that day"
Give Choices	2	2	"give them options to choose from maybe two appropriate behaviors to choose from"
Foster Relationships with Others	5	8	"I have to provide an educational environment that provides them with a setting that they can foster relationships with other people"
Use of movement (centers, rotations)	1	1	"all my kids were mixed together because we do a lot of centers, a lot of rotations, we move it around"
Limiting Distractions	2	4	"when you have way too many distractions that definitely affects the social the academic and the behavioral"
Consistency	2	2	"being open and consistent"
Being Flexible	1	1	"be flexible with the daily changes that could happen"

Table 15

Strategies Used by Teachers to Influence School Experience for Students Academically

Academic Strategy (Actual or Inferred) by Interviewee	Interviewees	Strategy Word/ Phrase Count	Examples
Classroom Structure/Set Up	9	32	"self-contained to meet their needs and the classroom environment is a more controlled environment"
Meeting Basic Needs	6	26	"if you don't have your emotional needs met and your physical needs met then the academics are going to fall short"
Teach Student on Ability Level and Build Up	8	24	"starting at the lower level in learning (that same task) and then you just build on it gradually"
Use or Adjust IEP	5	20	"the IEP because it talks about the accommodations and any strategies that we have to use with them"
Building Relationships	9	21	"I think building a relationship with them first is key"
Break/Chunk Work	3	7	"a lot of it I break into smaller pieces because our students do get so frustrated or tend to so quickly"
Allow Breaks	2	3	"we take breaks, we make sure that it's accessible for them for them to do the best that they can"
Lessening Assignments	1	1	"cutting down the number of assignments [they] are expected to do"
Choice of Assignments	2	2	"giving them choice of what work they want to do"
Be Flexible	2	2	"you have to be very flexible and be able to adjust to meet the needs of every individual student as it concerns their IEP"
Involve General Education Teacher	2	13	"I tell the teacher; this is where they at if and you go above that then you're gone shoot yourself in the foot"
Extra Assistance During the School Day	1	2	"I don't have a planning period because I want to be available to the students throughout the school day so that regardless of what block it is they can come in and get assistance"
Bi-Weekly Updates for General Education Teacher	1	1	"I sent out a bi-weekly progress report form to all the teachers"
Check Learning Management System (LMS)	1	1	"I do check power school every single day for all of them"
After School Office Hours	1	2	"I do work late after school almost every single day Monday through Friday"
Communication with Parents	3	9	"parents are the key, the foundation in making life easier"
Help Student Build Self-Advocacy Skills	1	3	"someone that's very shy and withdrawn, I just go with them to the teacher, where they can speak with the teacher privately"
Rewards	3	4	"I do give school gear"
Provide Academic Materials	1	1	"I provide my students with all of their school supplies typically because they don't always have what they need, I want them to feel like they are set up for success."
Basic Reading Strategies	1	1	"you definitely want to know a variety of strategies to use with them, such as your, your basic strategies"
Address situation	1	1	"I think would obviously definitely help figure out ways to help them - how to address academic, their academics"

Table 16

Strategies Used by Teachers to Influence School Experience for Students Behaviorally

Behavioral Strategies (Actual or Inferred) by Interviewee	Interviewees	Word Count	Examples
Providing Positive Classroom Culture	8	69	"I always tell them we respect, everyone and I think they learn from each other"
Communicating/Listening to Students	7	36	"I like for them to do is tell me what do you want, what do you need, and then I listen and then give them something - one of the things that they ask for that opens up a little bit of that rapport"
Build Relationships	8	31	"for my guys we spend the first few weeks of the school year just learning about each other"
Consistency with Providing Positive Feedback/Reinforcement/Consequences	6	29	"you never tell a student with emotional disabilities that they're going to get a consequence that you cannot give them"
Classroom Structure and Arrangement	6	24	"limited triggers, in our classroom so we know the students that have issues with one another, we do not seat them close to one another, we give them space"
Use of De-escalation Techniques	5	23	"we use a lot of wait time, we try to change the environment.
Calming Areas within Classroom	5	17	"I have a safe space or a calm down corner"
Address on an Individual basis	7	9	"What works to address the behavior challenge with one student may not work with the same exact behavior and another student"
Complete Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) Determine strategies to address the behavior	1	1	"one of the first things that we would do is, obviously, figure out the function of the behavior by doing a functional behavior assessment"
Read positive affirmations with students	1	1	"we'll go back there, and they'll say, Hey, let's read some of these together"
Self- Regulation Techniques	2	2	"we don't push the use of that because we want them to of course self-acclimate their behaviors and try to regulate on our own"
Role play behaviors	1	1	"we will do the role playing for behavior"
Allow student to express behaviors	2	3	"sometimes we just have to clear the space and let them get it out"
Consistent/Clear Rules/Expectations	4	15	"expectations have to be clear and concise from the very beginning. Day one, you have to explain to them and show them what is expected"
Parent/Student/Teacher Contract	1	1	"I also had a parent/teacher/ student contract that I put in place on back-to-school night"
Understand/Address the antecedent of the behavior	4	8	"you never really want to address the behavior without addressing the antecedent the caused the behavior, because every behavior has a reason"
Help the student set goals/ Provide them steps to reach goals	3	4	"goals and verbal reminders"
Regular communication/relationship with family members	4	6	"regularly communicating with family members"
Be flexible	1	1	"as a teacher of students with emotional disabilities, understanding that you have to be flexible"
Verbal/Visual reminders of behaviors	1	1	"having those visuals to consistently and verbally reminding them of behaviors"
Putting students in a position of power (classroom jobs)	1	1	"we make someone class leader and they are responsible for making schedules and telling the other students what they need to do"
Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP)	1	1	"we always use a behavior intervention plan and that is based upon each student's needs"
Use of Teacher Input on Discipline	1	1	"when you have a teacher that is successful with working with students with emotional disabilities allow that teacher when it's possible to give input on issues related to discipline"
Give Choices	2	2	"give them choices, choices are a big deal"

Figures 1, 2, and 3 display the key strategies that were identified to influence students'

school experience SAB.

Figure 1

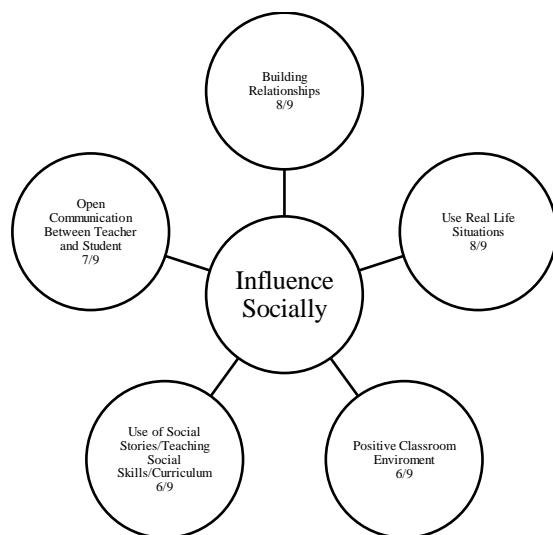*Key Strategies Identified to Influence Students' School Experience Socially*

Figure 2

Key Strategies Identified to Influence Students' School Experience Academically
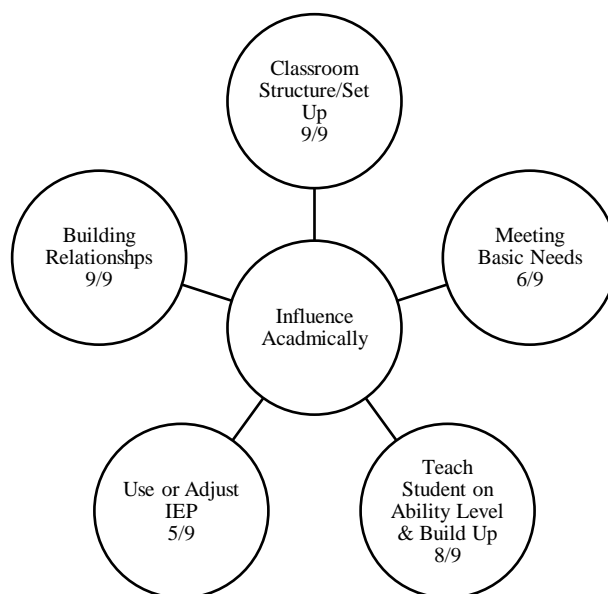
Figure 3

Key Strategies Identified to Influence Students' School Experience Behaviorally
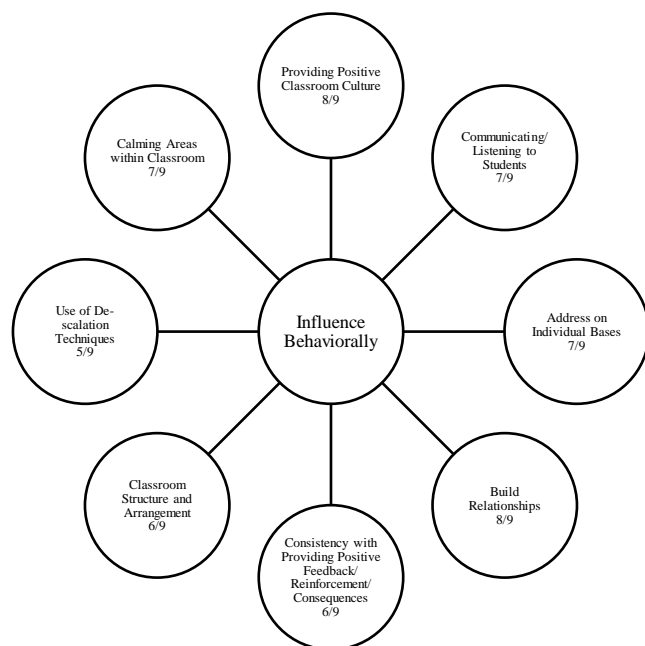
Table 17 summarizes the strategies to be organized around the four phases of relationship building. It contains the key strategies that were identified, number of interviewees, word counts, and supporting data.

Table 17

Identified SAB Strategies for Alignment with Four Phases of Building TSRs

Influence Area	Strategy (Actual or Inferred) by Interviewee	Interviewees	Strategy Word/Phrase Count	Examples
Socially	Building Relationships (knowing your students)	8	40	"first you got to get to know your kid that's my first thing"
	Use of Real-life situations	8	38	"natural environmental teaching, it's just going through every day with them at school and using certain situations or scenarios as teaching moments"
	Positive Classroom Environment	6	33	"if an environment makes a student feel welcomed and safe and loved and like and supported, then it's easier for me to do my job of actually educating them"
	Use Social stories/Teaching Social Skills/Curriculum	6	23	"there or times that you may incorporate a social story that could help them in the situation or circumstance"
	Open Communication Between Student and Teacher	7	20	"we're going to talk about it, and we are going to move forward"
Academically	Classroom Structure/Set Up	9	32	"self-contained to meet their needs and the classroom environment is a more controlled environment"
	Meeting Basic Needs	6	26	"if you don't have your emotional needs met and your physical needs met then the academics are going to fall short"
	Teach Student on Ability Level and Build Up	8	24	"starting at the lower level in learning (that same task) and then you just build on it gradually"
	Use or Adjust IEP	5	20	"the IEP because it talks about the accommodations and any strategies that we have to use with them"
	Building Relationships	9	21	"I think building a relationship with them first is key"
Behaviorally	Providing Positive Classroom Culture	8	69	"I always tell them we respect everyone and I think they learn from each other"
	Communicating/Listening to Students	7	36	"I like for them to do is tell me what do you want, what do you need, and then I listen and then give them something - one of the things that they ask for that opens up a little bit of that rapport"
	Build Relationships	8	31	"for my guys we spend the first few weeks of the school year just learning about each other"
	Consistency with Providing Positive Feedback/Reinforcement/Consequences	6	29	"you never tell a student with emotional disabilities that they're going to get a consequence that you cannot give them"
	Classroom Structure and Arrangement	6	24	"limited triggers, in our classroom so we know the students that have issues with one another, we do not seat them close to one another, we give them space"
	Use of De-escalation Techniques	5	23	"we use a lot of wait time, we try to change the environment.
	Calming Areas within Classroom	5	17	"I have a safe space or a calm down corner"
	Address on an Individual basis	7	9	"what works to address the behavior challenge with one student may not work with the same exact behavior and another student"

All interviewees expressed that the building of a TSR was necessary for the strategies to be successful. The interviewees shared from their experiences in their classrooms that a teacher

needs to get to know their students and their students need to get to know the teacher in order for the students to trust their teacher. In addition, providing the students with a positive classroom culture was important to address their emotional needs. Overall, the interviewees expressed that the use of strategies do influence the school experiences for students SAB.

Analysis of the nine interviewees' responses to the research questions generated emerging themes, which are discussed in Chapter 5. The next chapter provides practitioners with practical strategies based on the findings to address the needs of students SAB. Additionally, the TSR phases organized around the identified strategies to provide practitioners with practical strategies to use in each phase of TSR building.

Chapter 5: Findings, Summary, and Conclusions

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the K–12 teacher-student relationship (TSR) by identifying strategies that teachers use to influence students with emotional disabilities' (EDs') school experiences socially, academically, and behaviorally (SAB). Insight on the influence of school experiences and strategies used were sought from elementary, middle, and organized around the four phases (appraisal, testing, agreement, and planning) of building TSRs.

The study was guided by the research questions: (1) What strategies do teachers of students with emotional disabilities use to develop students' social skills? (2) What strategies do teachers of students with emotional disabilities use to develop students' academic skills? (3) What strategies do teachers of students with emotional disabilities use to develop students' behavioral skills? (4) How do the strategies that have been identified align with the four phases (appraisal, testing, agreement, and planning) of building teacher-student relationships?

This chapter provides an overview of findings, a discussion of findings, practitioner implications, policy implications, conclusions, recommendations for further research, and researcher reflections.

Overview of Findings

Interviewees were teachers from eight schools (six elementary, one middle, two high) within two school divisions (one rural, one city). The school divisions located in the city is surrounded by a rural geographic area. There are eight findings based on the data analysis of interviewees' responses to the interview questions regarding strategies that teachers who teach populations with EDs use to influence their students' school experience SAB. There are four findings in regard to the organization of the identified strategies around the four phases of relationship building from the data analysis of the interviewee's responses.

1. Interviewees indicated that building relationships with students is essential to be successful with strategies that influence students socially, academically, and behaviorally (SAB).

2. Interviewees noted that communication between student and teacher is necessary to ensure success with students who have been identified with an ED.

3. Interviewees indicated that the physical classroom environment (arrangement) and a positive classroom culture/environment (emotional support) influence students SAB.

4. The interviewees indicated that using social stories, teaching social skills curricula, and using real-life situations assist students in improving socially.

5. The interviewees indicated that meeting the basic needs of students before addressing academic needs helps students to succeed academically.

6. The interviewees indicated that teaching the students on their ability level and building up along with using and adjusting the Individualized Education Program (IEP) as needed aids students in succeeding academically.

7. The interviewees indicated that addressing the behavior on an individual basis and using de-escalation techniques influence students behaviorally.

8. The interviewees indicated that being consistent with providing feedback, reinforcements, and consequences influences students behaviorally.

9. Seven strategies organized around the appraisal phase of building TSRs: Building Relationships, Communication and Listening, Address on an Individual Basis, Meeting Basic Needs, Positive Classroom Environment/Culture, Use of Real-Life Situations, and Use Social Stories/Teaching Social Skills/Curriculum.

10. Six strategies organized around the agreement phase of building TSRs: Building Relationships, Communication and Listening, Address on an Individual Basis, Meeting Basic Needs, Use of Real-Life Situations, and Use Social Stories/Teaching Social Skills/Curriculum.

11. Nine strategies organized around the testing phase of building TSRs: Building Relationships, Communication and Listening, Address on an Individual Basis, Meeting Basic Needs, Use of De-escalation Techniques, Use of Real-Life Situations, Use Social Stories/Teaching Social Skills/Curriculum, and Consistency with Providing Feedback/Reinforcement/Consequences, Calming Areas within the Classroom.

12. Nine strategies organized around the planning phase of building TSRs: Building Relationships, Communication and Listening, Address on an Individual Basis, Meeting Basic Needs, Classroom Structure/Arrangement/Set up, Use of Real-Life Situations, Use Social Stories/Teaching Social Skills/Curriculum, Use on Adjust IEP, and Teach Students on Ability Level.

Discussion of Findings

Finding 1. *Interviewees indicated that building relationships with students is essential to be successful with strategies that influence students socially, academically, and behaviorally (SAB).* All the interviewees discussed that building relationships with students assisted with the success of the strategies in at least one area of influence: socially (8 out 9), academically (9 out of 9) and behaviorally (8 out of 9). Interviewees shared their procedures, activities, and experiences when getting to know their students. Also, they shared how important it is for the TSR that students to get to know the teacher as well. According to Hunt and Mullen (2021), "students from various backgrounds who perceive their teachers as valuing them, and supportive

of their interests and needs, are more likely advancing socially, academically, and behaviorally"

(p. 2). They are imperative in influencing student's academic, social, behavioral, and emotional

development (Brinkworth et al., 2018; McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015).

Finding 2. *Interviewees noted that communication between student and teacher is*

necessary to ensure success with students who have been identified with an ED. When

addressing social situations and when addressing behavioral challenges, seven out of nine

interviewees discussed the importance of being able to have open communication when assisting

students. Also, they noted listening and students feeling comfortable with the teacher to express

their needs as being important components of that communication. Interviewee 5 stated, "So

what I like for them to do is tell me what you want, what do you need, and then I listen and then

give them something—one of the things that they ask for that opens up a little bit of that rapport,

it starts the rapport and also just listening."

Interviewee 9 explained it as

When they have those roller coaster moments you want them to feel comfortable enough

to know that. Okay. Yeah, I had that moment, but it's okay (teacher name) is gonna let me

have my moment we're going to come back together. We're going to talk about it and

we're going to move forward.

The two distinct identified dimensions of TSRs are *closeness* and *conflict* (Mason et al.,

2017; Sabol & Pianta, 2012). Closeness is defined as the amount of warmth and positive affect

between the teacher and the child and how comfortable the child is approaching the teacher

(Mason et al., 2017; Sabol & Pianta, 2012).

Finding 3. *Interviewees indicated that the physical classroom environment*

(arrangement) and a positive classroom culture/environment (emotional support) influence

students SAB. Six out of nine interviewees indicated that classroom setup influenced students behaviorally, and nine out of nine interviewees indicated that classroom setup impacted students academically. The interviewees explained that having certain areas in the classroom such calming areas or safe zone areas provided students the ability to destress and "take a moment" when need to get themselves back under control. Also, these areas could be used as personal study areas when students were asked to complete an undesirable activity. Additionally, having the classroom arranged in a way that all students were visual, proximity control, and spacing students out are examples that were discussed. Interviewee 2 shared, "little reading areas just somewhere where they can feel comfortable and doing something that might not be a preferred thing they can go in, it can become a preferred activity."

The physical classroom environment can influence student behavior and success as noted by Earthman and Lemasters (1998), Gaines and Curry (2011), Leggio and Terras (2019), and Zaheer et al. (2019). "Easy eye contact is very important; everyone needs to be visible to one another at all times. Everything should be positioned in a manner where you can safely walk around in and out" stated Interviewee 8. Students with EDs often experience behavioral outbursts and need time to gain self-control and regulate their emotions. Having a physical space for students to de-escalate in the classroom is of particular importance when they are experiencing severe behaviors (Leggio & Terras, 2019). A physical environment that has minimal distractions, clear access to learning materials, and teacher accessibility provides a sense of structure and predictability for the students (Zaheer et al., 2019).

Within the physical classroom, interviewees discussed how the positive classroom culture/environment (emotional support) enhances student performance socially (6 out of 9 interviewees) and behaviorally (8 out of 9 interviewees).

As explained by Interviewee 9,

> If you don't have a welcoming classroom then your students don't feel comfortable. You
> want them, to feel that this is their safe place that this is their go to, that this is their place.
> You know, you want them to feel like they are part of it.

Interviewee 8 agreed and shared, "If an environment makes a student feel welcomed and safe and loved and like and supported, then it's easier for me to do my job of actually educating them." For students with EDs, Leggio and Terras (2019) noted that "creating a homey, consistent environment for student ownership and for creating a calm learning space" is important (p. 8).

Finding 4. *The interviewees indicated that using social stories, teaching social skills curricula, and using real-life situations assist students in improving socially.* The use of social stories, teaching social skills curriculums (6 out of 9) and use of real-life situations (8 out of 9) assisted teachers with helping student understanding the rules and expectations of social situations according to the interviewees. The majority of the interviewees discussed using social stories and related materials with their younger students and using real-life situations with all students. As shared by Interviewee 2,

> I have a curriculum that I've purchased and it is using two [cartoon] cats and they have a
> bunch of different social situations like anger, making friends, and some stuff like that
> and I'll use that for my little ones. Now for my older that's my real-life situations.

Evans et al. (2012) noted that "social skills instruction" and "social and coping skills" are strategies that teachers are using (p. 87).

Finding 5. *The interviewees indicated that meeting the basic needs of students before addressing academic needs helps students succeed academically.* Six out of nine interviewees felt that meeting the basic needs of students first then addressing academic needs produced better

academic results for the students. Interviewees shared that students needed to feel safe, loved, nurtured, and have their social, behavioral, and physical needs met before academics could be addressed. McGrath and Van Bergan (2015) and "Attachment Theory" (n.d) found that children who struggle to form attachments with their caregivers do not have a "secure base" to seek reassurance when they try new experiences (p. 2).

Finding 6. *The interviewees indicated that teaching the students on their ability level and build up and using and adjusting the Individualized Education Program (IEP) as needed aids students in succeeding academically.* Eight out of nine interviewees shared a mutual strategy of teaching students on their ability level and building up. The interviewees indicated that most students with an ED are not on grade level. To build confidence and lower frustrations, the teacher must figure out where the students are academically and start at that level and increase the level of the task as students are ready for it. Adjusting the IEP will assist with academics, according to five (out of nine) of the interviewees. As teachers learn their students, they can adjust the students' IEPs to match their academic needs. Interviewee 3 explained, "I start small and I build them up. Give them something I know they can absolutely do and then make it a little bit harder. And if it doesn't work out, change their goals."

Explicit Instruction is an effective instruction strategy used with students, according to Zaheer et al. (2019). One component of *Explicit Instruction* "involves determining current levels of performance to determine starting points of instructions, as well as planning for activities such as priming background knowledge to connect past learning with new information being presented to students" (p. 121)

Finding 7. *The interviewees indicated that addressing the behavior on an individual basis and using de-escalation techniques influence students behaviorally.* Seven out of the nine

interviewees stressed that addressing the behaviors of students needed to be on an individual basis, and five interviewees explained that the use of de-escalation techniques helps defuse behaviors. "What works to address the behavior challenge with one student may not work with the same exact behavior and another student," shared an interviewee. It is important for teachers to use research-based strategies to address the needs of students with EDs (Evans et al., 2012; Mitchell et al., 2019; Zaheer et al., 2019) because their needs are multifaceted (Leggio & Terras, 2019; Zaheer et al., 2019).

    Finding 8. *The interviewees indicated that being consistent with providing feedback, reinforcements, and consequences influences students behaviorally.* Six out of nine interviewees shared that being consistent with providing feedback, reinforcements, and consequences is important when addressing behaviors—positive or corrective—when working with student with EDs. Interviewees shared that teachers need to be consistent and never offer a consequence or reinforcement that they cannot follow through with. Zaheer et al., 2019, noted that "in classrooms with consistent and clear expectations there is a higher likelihood of prosocial behavior from students and a decreased chance for negative interactions between teacher and students" (p. 119-120). Also, the use of reinforcement systems can impact outcomes such as "strengthened student-teacher relationship," "increases in prosocial behaviors, intrinsic motivation, academic engagement, and achievement," "decreases in off-task and disruptive behaviors" (p. 120).

    Finding 9. *Seven strategies organized around the appraisal phase of building TSRs: Building Relationships, Communication and Listening, Address on an Individual Basis, Meeting Basic Needs, Positive Classroom Environment/Culture, Use of Real-Life Situations, and Use Social Stories/Teaching Social Skills/Curriculum.* The identified key strategies from

the areas of influence (socially, academically, and behaviorally) were placed in a table and divided by area of influence. Each strategy was organized around the phase or phases that fit best by combining the definition of each phase from the literature and the interviewee's definition or use of the strategies. The appraisal phase requires informal gathering of information for both parties involved, sorting out roles, and resolving any ideas the parties might have about each other (Newberry, 2010). The interviewees described these strategies as making a student feel welcomed, getting to know the student, and learning the student for example. Some of the interviewees provided specific examples of how they start building the relationship. Interviewee 2 shared that when a new student comes to the classroom, they ask basic get-to-know-you questions of the student and then have the student ask them similar questions. Interviewee 8 discussed how it is important to get to know the families as well as the students.

Finding 10*. Six strategies organized around the agreement phase of building TSRs: Building Relationships, Communication and Listening, Address on an Individual Basis, Meeting Basic Needs, Use of Real-Life Situations, and Use Social Stories/Teaching Social Skills/Curriculum.* The identified key strategies from the areas of influence (socially, academically, and behaviorally) were placed in a table and divided by area of influence. Each strategy was organized around the phase or phases that fit best by combining the definition of each phase from the literature and the interviewee's definition or use of the strategies. During the agreement phase, the roles are accepted, expectations are outlined, and power struggles are defined (Newberry, 2010). "In order for me to get to know a student and to know what they need, socially behaviorally and academically, you really have to form a really good working relationship with them," stated interviewee 7.

Finding 11. *Nine strategies organized around the testing phase of building TSRs: Building Relationships, Communication and Listening, Address on an Individual Basis, Meeting Basic Needs, Use of De-escalation Techniques, Use of Real-Life Situations, Use Social Stories/Teaching Social Skills/Curriculum, Consistency with Providing Feedback/ Reinforcements/Consequences, and Calming Areas within the Classroom.* The identified key strategies from the areas of influence (socially, academically, and behaviorally) were placed in a table and divided by area of influence. Each strategy was organized around the phase or phases that fit best by combining the definition of each phase from the literature and the interviewee's definition or use of the strategies. Exploring limits and boundaries, including limits to personalities, authority, roles, interaction, conduct, and classroom norms occur in the testing phase (Newberry, 2010). Students may test the limits of "teacher authority, strength, and consistency of the power structure, and the norms of the school environment" while cycling through this stage (Newberry, 2010, p. 1698). "The biggest thing that we work on is expressing your feelings with words because a lot of the violence is physical, whether it's throwing stuff or I mean hurting themselves" explained interviewee 3.

Finding 12. *Nine strategies organized the planning phase of building TSRs: Building Relationships, Communication and Listening, Address on an Individual Basis, Meeting Basic Needs, Classroom Structure/Arrangement/Set up, Use of Real-Life Situations, Use Social Stories/Teaching Social Skills/Curriculum, Use or Adjust IEP, and Teach Students on Ability Level.* The identified key strategies from the areas of influence (socially, academically, and behaviorally) were placed in a table and divided by area of influence. Each strategy was organized around the phase or phases that fit best by combining the definition of each phase from the literature and the interviewee's definition or use of the strategies. The planning phase is

dedicated to reflecting on interactions, designing future communication methods and participation, and moving the relationship along. Reflection and preparation to move the relationship along is a major focus during this stage. As relationships evolve the teacher in the study was able to use this stage for planning academic tasks and no longer concentrated on moving the relationship (Newberry, 2010).

Practitioner Implications

Educational leaders (building and division level) and teachers concerned with building relationships and implementing strategies that positively influence the school experience for students with EDs should consider the findings of this study.

1. **Educational leaders (building and division level) and teachers should consider implementing the strategies that influence students SAB.** This would allow educational leaders and teachers to use strategies that are known to have an influence on students. As discussed in Chapter 2 it is important for student with EDs to have teachers to use effective strategies to help the student achieve at their best level. This implication is associated with Finding 1, 3-8.

2. **Educational leaders (building and division level) and teachers should consider the importance of building relationships with students with an ED.** The data analysis indicates how vital it is to build relationship with students who have an ED for them to be success with SAB. Educational leaders need to get to know students so that they can address the students by name and provide a more meaning impact on the student SAB. This implication is associated with Finding 1.

3. **Educational leaders (building level and division level) and teachers should consider the four phases of building a relationship and the strategies that are align with each**

phase to help guide the building of the relationship. Understanding that building a relationship with students are important using the four phases of relationship building provides a guide to build a positive relationship with students. Having the aligned strategies within the four phases gives educational leaders and teachers examples of strategies to implement during each phase. This implication is associated with Finding 9-12.

4. **Educational leaders (building level and division level) should provide a community of care and support for the student and the teachers of students with an ED.** The data analysis detailed how important it is for the teachers to receive support/ understanding and communication from the educational leader. Some of the interviewees also discussed the educational leaders supporting the students, not just being the disciplinary when needed. Educational leaders have an obligation that is outlined in the PSEL to provide a community of care and support for all students. This implication is associated with Finding 1-8.

Conclusions

The study adds to the body of literature on K-12 TSRs by identifying successful strategies that elementary, middle, high school teachers use to foster social, academic, and behavioral growth with students with EDs. The strategies were aligned within the four phases (appraisal, agreement, testing, and planning) of building TSRs. Interviewees were from two school divisions in the southwest region of Virginia. Interviewees identified strategies that can influence the students SAB and how those strategies are connected to the TSRs.

The data analysis suggested that effective strategies are fundamental in the social, academic, and behavioral growth for students. Interviewees shared experiences and provided

effective strategies for fostering growth and influencing the school experiences for students

SAB. Building relationships (getting to know your students), communication, physical classroom

environment, and positive culture are connectors to ensure the strategies teachers are using to

influence students SAB are effective. Teaching social skills, using social stories, and use of real-

life situations are the strategies that helped the teachers have the maximum influence on the

students socially. To help students academically, teachers discussed that teaching the student on

their ability level and building up and adjusting the IEP as needed helps the students build

confidence and show improvement. Interviewees stressed addressing the basic needs of students

before focusing on academic tasks. Interviewees found that addressing behavior situations on an

individual bases, being consistent with feedback, reinforcements, and consequences, and using

de-escalation techniques influence the students' school experience behaviorally. The alignment

of the four phases of building TSRs with the identified strategies provided teachers and

educational leaders a hands-on approach as to what strategies they could implement during each

phase to build a positive TSR.

Recommendations for Further Research

The findings of this study provide information on strategies that teachers are using to

influence students' school experiences SAB. Additionally, the study aligned those strategies

within the four phases of TSR to provide an outline of what strategies can be used to build or

rebuild the relationship during each phase. The researcher has identified three recommendations

for further research based on the findings.

1. Further research could be conducted to include urban school divisions and rural divisions.

   A comparative study could be completed to investigate if there are differences in

strategies used with students in each geographic region to influence their school experiences SAB.

2. The study could be expanded to include interviews with school level educational leaders to get their perspective on building relationships and the strategies they use with students with an ED.

3. The study could be expanded to include interviews with students to gain knowledge on their perspectives of the strategies that teachers use and TSRs.

Researcher Reflections

As a school administrator and former teacher of students with EDs, I have always been extremely interested in how TSRs influence the school experience for students who are at risk SAB. My interest for wanting to do this study originates from first-hand experiences with students who are in special education that exhibit at-risk factors and from my attempt to ensure they received the best school experience available. Although, some students with EDs can be difficult to teach and connect with, as educators I feel it is our ethical responsibility to find strategies to use with all students that produce positive results. I continually strived to think outside the box and provide my students with the support they need to succeed in all areas. While doing this research study, I had the opportunity to interview phenomenal educators who showed such passion towards providing their students the greatest school experience possible. They all shared their specific strategies, experiences, and thoughts on TSRs and while doing so you could literally watch the emotional attachment (love, care, protective nature, etc.) they have for their students shine through as they discussed each topic.

I hope this research provides educational leaders and teachers strategies to use with students who are experiencing difficulties in the school environment SAB. Also, it is my aim that

the strategies aligned with the four phases of building TSRs is guide or starting point to help educational leaders and teachers build positive relationship with students. Additionally, the researcher strives to bring awareness to the growing field of ED and continued research on effective strategies to use with students for success in the school environment.

I want to acknowledge that the key strategies that were produced from the research would be useful to build relationships with all students not just specifically students with an ED. However, I feel certain students need educators to reach out, provide grace, and/or put in more effort to building a powerful relationship with them due to certain circumstances that can hinder relationship building. These strategies will be helpful to build a more substantial or influential relationship with all students.

Currently, the education world is experiencing a multitude of changes on how we educate students due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of the study show the TSRs are fundamental for the success of students with EDs. It is important to continue building relationships and show students that educators care even though they are not in brick-and-mortar buildings. The interviewees were extremely concerned about this and how things were changing due to the pandemic. However, as we all adjust our "new normal," educational leaders and teachers will work to overcome these challenges and develop students' resilience.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Literature Summary of Research on Teacher Student Relationships

Sources of Literature Reviewed on the Topic of Teacher-Student Relationships (Hunt & Mullen, 2021)

Author & Date	Central Themes	Methods & Data Sources	Research Findings	Literature Review Notes
Brinkworth et al. (2018)	TSRs are: • Dyadic interactions • Memories • Perceptions • Time Created TSR scale: • Measures teachers' and students' perceptions of the relationship • Measures views (positive and negative) • Quality of overall TSR	Method: Survey design process followed the researchers' earlier work Total Study Participants: • Students (n=595) • Teachers (n=88) • Secondary schools (n=4) TRS Scale • Teacher and students completed a positivity subscale, negativity subscale Academic Outcomes • Student grades • Class participation Affect Towards School • Sense of belongingness • Four-item scale from the literature Behavior • Percentage of homework • Class participation Motivation • Student effort • Student report self-efficacy • Adapted a 5-item scale	Academic • "Significant associations [exist] between both teachers' TSR-positivity and TRS-negativity and student grades" (p. 33) Affect • "Students' TSR-positivity was associated with their interest in the class. Higher values of students' TSR-negativity also predict higher levels of interest" (p. 33) Behavior • "Teacher's TSR-positivity has a strong association with students' class participation" (p. 33) Motivation • "The more students' felt positively about their relationship with their teachers, the harder they reported trying in class" (p. 33) TSR scale: • "Explains more variability in student outcomes. [There are] different patterns of associations between TSRs and student outcomes" (p. 34)	• Perceptions of TSRs are formed by students and teachers • Student perceptions of TSRs are a determinant in their outcomes • TSR Scale has teacher and student viewpoints

Author & Date	Central Themes	Methods & Data Sources	Research Findings	Literature Review Notes
Davis (2003)	• TSRs influence social and cognitive outcomes as early as preschool and continue to influence students' social and intellectual development throughout childhood and adolescence" (p. 208) • TSRs were viewed from attachment, motivation, and sociocultural perspectives; e.g., TSRs can be influenced by students' beliefs (an attachment theory perspective) • Motivation perspectives: TSRs are influenced by teachers' motivations, interpersonal skills, instructional practices, attempts to socialize, and a motivation to learn • Social–cultural perspectives: TSRs reflect the interpersonal culture of classrooms and schools, opportunities to invest in alternative relationships, and ability for student–teacher and material connection	Method: Literature review; analysis of articles published within 20 years on: • TSRs • Student–teacher interactions • Role of TSRs in social motivation Searched journals in these areas: • Education • Psychology • Child development Examined citations from published literature reviews and individual studies in: • Anthropology • Sociology of Education Peer-reviewed articles and conference papers reviewed	• Attachment theory perspectives: "TSRs may be influenced by students' beliefs" (p. 208) • Motivation perspectives: "TSRs are influenced by teachers' motivations, interpersonal skills, and instructional practices, and attempts to socialize the motivation to learn" (p. 208) • Social–cultural perspectives: "[TSRs] reflect the interpersonal culture of classrooms and schools," opportunities to invest in alternative relationships, and ability for student–teacher and material connection (p. 208) Future studies need to explore: • If "supportive relationships can protect marginalized student populations or contribute to resilience" (p. 224) • If "gender differences [exist] in types of interactions, pursuit of relationships, and relationship outcomes" (p. 224) E.g., from a motivation perspective concerning middle schoolers' transition: • Good relationship with all teachers/ one teacher • Not liking subject content translates into not liking the teacher • Good TSRs change student perception	Related TSRs to theories Teacher influence impacts students' school experience

Author & Date	Central Themes	Methods & Data Sources	Research Findings	Literature Review Notes
Hughes et al. (2001)	• Relations between peers' perceptions of the TSR and their evaluation of children's attributes and liking for children" (p. 292)	Method: Longitudinal prevention study—quantitative Total Study Participants at 11 Schools: • Grade 3 and 4 students (N=993; 497 males, 496 females) • 24% African American • 31% Hispanic • 44% white Data Sources: • Behaviorally at-risk (N=71) • Peer evaluations • Social competencies • TSRs • Peer-rated liking • Teacher report (at-risk only)	• Teachers rated relationship as close and they had less conflict with girls; peers rated girls as receiving more teacher support and boys as having conflict with the teacher • "Teacher Support and Teacher Conflict [were] moderately correlated and make independent contributions to prediction peer outcomes" (p. 298) • Students consulted TSR information when "responding to sociometric questionnaires" (p. 298) • Girls: higher support scores boys: higher conflict scores Future Studies: • "Observations of child behavior" and "teacher–student interaction" • "Measures of peer perceptions of TSRQ, child attributes, and liking of the child" (p. 299)	Teacher perceptions of a student can influence peer relations experienced by students
Hughes & Chen (2011)	• Increased "understanding of the linkages between two domains of classroom relationships, teacher–student relationships and peer relationships, over grades 2 to 4 as well as their joint influence on students' academic self-efficacy" (p. 280)	Method: Longitudinal (5 years)—quantitative Total Study Participants (grades 2 to 4): • Grade 1 students (N=695) • 3 school districts • Low achieving; ethnically diverse Measures: • Annual assessments for 5 years • Covariables and baseline (year 1) • Social relatedness (year 2, 3, 4) • Academic self-advocacy (year 5)	• "Peer liking and PAR were moderately correlated. Peer liking and TSRQ exhibited bidirectional effects across the three years" (p. 278) • "Student observations of teacher–student interactions may serve as affective bias [shaping their view of student ability]" (p. 284) • "Quality of students' affective relationships with teachers is influenced more by [the child's] characteristics [e.g., "agreeableness and prosocial behavior], than by [a child's academic [reputation]" (p. 284)	Relationship between TSR and peer relatedness (school experience) Peer acceptance or rejection Need for teacher professional development in building TSRs

Author & Date	Central Themes	Methods & Data Sources	Research Findings	Literature Review Notes
Mason et al. (2017)	• Mutual relationship between Teacher–Student Closeness and Teacher–Student Conflict • Teacher closeness and conflict impact student achievement • TSRQ and student achievement are related	Method: Longitudinal (confirmatory factorial analysis model panel data)—quantitative Total Study Participants: • Grades 1, 3, and 5 (N=1,133) Locations: Arkansas, California, Kansas, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Pennsylvania (two cities), Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin Instrument and Data Sources: • 15-item Closeness and Conflict subscales from Pianta's 1992 STRS Teacher Closeness Subscale: • 8 items used on the STRS Teacher Conflict Subscale • 7 items used on the STRS Academic Achievement • Reading and math subtest on the Woodcock–Johnson Revised Tests of Achievement	• Relative to the "lower-risk sample, measures of TSRQ and achievement may serve as predictors or outcomes and directionally of effects should not be assumed in advance" (p. 177)	*Conflict* and *closeness* are inherently important in TSRs and the success of these relationships
McGrath & Van Bergen (2015)	TSRs are of critical importance—this relationship influences children's academic, social, behavioral, and emotional development Theorizing of TSRs from: • Attachment theory • Self-determination theory • Ecological systems theory	Method: Review of literature • 92 studies examined: 75 on TSRs and the others on related topics • 12 review articles • a classic study was referenced • 5 books and other sources (national census data, published rating scale, etc.)	• Positive TSR can buffer the negative experiences of students with risk factors • Teachers need to "consider reasons for students' disruptive behaviors" (p. 14) • Match teachers and students with similar temperaments • "Teachers who [build/rebuild] rapport with their students [offer them] the best chance of success in and beyond the school environment" (p. 14)	TSRs influence children's academic, social, behavioral, and emotional development and outcomes at school Theories associated with TSRs

Author & Date	Central Themes	Methods & Data Sources	Research Findings	Literature Review Notes
Murray & Pianta (2007)	• "The importance of supportive [TSRs] in the lives of adolescents with high incident disabilities" (p. 105)	Method: Review of theoretical and empirical data, and review of multiple studies combined	Factors contributing to TSRs: • "Organizational structures and resources" • "Classroom structure and practices" • "Teacher beliefs, behaviors, and actions" • "Individual skills for developing prosocial relationships" (p. 107) • "Efforts to improve [TSRs] that contain multiple components (e.g., school wide, classroom, teachers, and student) are likely to yield more favorable results [than efforts] focused on only one level" (p. 110)	Supportive TSRs: adolescents with high-incidence disabilities. Students with special needs at risk of experiencing problems at school that can impact their experiences and outcomes
Newberry (2010)	• Teachers respond differently to each student • "An attempt to understand the motivations and rationales for the different behaviors of teachers towards students" (p. 1695)	Method: case study—qualitative • Observations and fieldnotes: classroom observation (18 hours) • Structured Interviews: used Adapted IOS protocol four times • Semi-structured interviews • Written reflections	Relationship phases are circular: • *Appraisal:* gathering information *Agreement:* establishing routines *Testing:* exploring boundaries/limits *Planning:* cultivating the relationship • Teacher education needs to include "the consequences of the emotional work required to build and maintain positive [TSRs]" (p. 1702) • To create good rapport, "space and time" are needed as teachers "work through the different relationship phases with students" (p. 1702)	Relationship have developmental phases Advisable to build/ rebuild relationships Relationships are central to teaching and student outcomes

Pianta & Nimetz (1991)	• Security and insecurity aspects of TSRs are significant and should be studied
	• Teacher perspective of TSRs
		Method: Quantitative (factor analysis)
		
		Total Study Participants for 6 Schools:
		    • Students (n=72)
		    • Teachers (n=24)
		
		Teachers completed survey for three children in their classroom(s)
		
		PBRS, STRS, and TCRS (data sources)
		
		Mother–child interactions
			TSRs are "multidimensional and related to … mother–child interactions, home, classroom, and … behavior" (p. 388)
			
			Future Research:
			• STRS validation with various samples
			• Classroom observations for comparison and relationship aspects (gender, age, etc.) need examination
			• "Relationship patterns" between teachers and with parents "would help to clarify … continuity" (p. 391)
				The competence of "high-risk children is their having a relationship with an adult in which they experience security and a sense of self-esteem" (p. 38)
				
				Use of STRS

Author & Date	Central Themes	Methods & Data Sources	Research Findings	Literature Review Notes
Rudasill et al. (2010)	• "The mediating role of student–teacher relationship quality on the relation between background characteristics, and difficult temperament (assessed age 4 ½ years) and risky behavior in early adolescence" (p. 395) • Conflict and closeness • Characteristics of risky behavior • Background characteristics • Temperament • Quality of TSRs	Method: longitudinal—quantitative (structural equation modeling, two models) • Student–Teacher *Conflict* as the mediator • Student–Teacher *Closeness* as the mediator Total Study Participants: • NICHD study of childcare and youth development (N=1,156, 593 boys and 563 girls) • Grades 4, 5, and 6 Measures • Early adolescent background characteristics and behavior • Difficult temperament • Used STRQ—Conflict subscale (8 items) and Closeness subscale (7 items) • Early adolescent risky behavior	Teacher–Student C*onflict* mediated background characters and risky behavior • "Students' family income, gender, receipt of special services, and more difficult temperament were associated with risky behavior" (p. 389) Teacher–Student C*loseness* mediated student family income and risky behavior • "Closer [TSRs] were associated with less risky behavior" (p. 389). Negative [TSRs] may increase the risk that certain adolescents will engage in risky behavior" (pp. 389–390)	Closeness and Conflict Risky behaviors and TSRQ are influenced by student background

Legend
EBD: Emotional and behavioral disorders
NICHD: National Institute on Child Health and Human Development
PAR: Peer Academic Reputation
PBRS: Preschool Behavior Rating Scale
STRS: Student–Teacher Relationship Scale
TCRS: Teacher Child Rating Scales
TSRQ: Teacher–student relationship quality
TSR Scale: Teacher – Student Relationship Scale
TSR: Teacher–student relationship
TSRs: Teacher–student relationships

Appendix B: CITI Certificate

Completion Date 11-Jul-2019
Expiration Date 10-Jul-2022
Record ID 32360544

This is to certify that:

Turonne Hunt

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Basic Responsible Conduct of Research Course (Curriculum Group)
Basic Responsible Conduct of Research Course (Course Learner Group)
1 - RCR (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University (Virginia Tech)

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w3c3d6b67-8a10-45fc-a56e-acd069ef9c1e-32360544

Completion Date   06-Apr-2020
Expiration Date   06-Apr-2023
Record ID   32360542

This is to certify that:

Turonne Hunt

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification
through CME. Do not use for
TransCelerate mutual recognition
(see Completion Report).

Social & Behavioral Research   (Curriculum Group)
Social & Behavioral Research   (Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course   (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University (Virginia Tech)

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w5873ed29-f295-4fcf-9ce6-dd7f26ac5d59-32360542

Appendix C: Letter to Assistant Superintendent Requesting Permission

Dear Assistant Superintendent,

I am a doctoral candidate at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies program. I am working under the direction of my advisor and committee chair, Dr. Carol A. Mullen. I have proposed a research study that, once completed, will become my doctoral dissertation. The purpose of this letter is to provide an overview of my study and request your permission to conduct the research study in Henry County Public Schools.

I am interested in exploring the K-12 teacher-student relationship with a focus on students with emotional disabilities. This study will explore the K-12 teacher-student relationship (TSR) by identifying strategies that teachers use to influence students with emotional disabilities' (EDs) school experiences socially, academically, and behaviorally. Teacher perspectives on the impact of TSRs on school experiences will be sought from elementary, middle, and high school teachers who are currently teaching students with emotional disabilities. The acknowledgment and understanding of elementary, middle, and high school teachers' perspectives may generate new insight that can benefit students, teachers, and educational leaders. Also, the study will provide educators at all levels with practical outcomes that they can apply to address teacher-student relationships (TSRs).

The study is a basic qualitative study that will include one 45-60-minute interview with each participant, conducted by me, the researcher. I would like to interview 7 to 13 teachers, which would include interviewing all emotional disability (ED) teachers from each level: elementary, middle, and high school.

At no time will their involvement disrupt their daily teaching responsibilities. The study will conform to the requirements set forth by the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB). A written report of the study will be provided to you upon completion.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to receiving your permission to conduct the interviews. If any questions or concerns arise, please feel free to contact me; my contact information follows.

Sincerely,

Turonne K. Hunt
Director, Transitional Day Program
Doctoral Candidate, Virginia Tech School of Education

Appendix D: Letter to Prospective Interview Participants

Dear: _____,

      I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies program at Virginia Tech, working under the direction of Dr. Carol A. Mullen. The topic of my dissertation study focuses on exploring the K-12 teacher-student relationship (TSR) with a specific focus on students with emotional disabilities (EDs) based on teacher perspective. I hope to gain teacher insight on the TSR, how it influences school experiences for students, and strategies that are used with students with EDs. Criteria for participating teachers consist of special education teachers who are teaching or have taught students with EDs. You have been identified as a teacher who meets the criteria for this research study. Your participation in the study will not affect, in any manner, your position as a teacher in the division. Your interview responses will be kept anonymous, and any identifying factors will be kept confidential.

      Your participation in the study is requested. I am interested in your experiences and insight on teacher-student relationships with students with EDs. The research study will conform to the requirements set forth by the Virginia Tech IRB. Thank you for your consideration in participating in this study. Please email me if you are willing to participate or have any questions.

Sincerely,

Turonne Hunt
Director, Transitional Day Program
Doctoral Candidate, Virginia Tech

Appendix E: Consent Form

I volunteer to participate in a research study conducted by Turonne Hunt, Doctoral Candidate at Virginia Polytechnic and State University. I understand that the study is designed to explore the K-12 teacher-student relationship (TSR) by identifying strategies that teachers use to influence students with emotional disabilities' (EDs) school experiences socially, academically, and behaviorally. I will be one of approximately 7 - 13 participants being interviewed for this research.

1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If I decline to participate or withdraw from the study, no one in my division will be told.

2. If I feel uncomfortable during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.

3. Should I agree to participate, I will be asked approximately 8 questions by the researcher. The interview will last approximately 45 - 60 minutes. Notes will be written during the interview. The interview will be audio recorded.

4. I understand all audio recordings and transcriptions of the interviews will be stored at the conclusion of the study as in accordance with the Virginia Tech (VT) Institutional Review Board (IRB) regulations before being destroyed.

5. I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any documents using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality and anonymity as a participant in this study will remain secure.

6. I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The Virginia Tech (VT) Institutional Review Board (IRB) may view the study's data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in research.

I have read the Consent Form and conditions of this study. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary and verbal consent:

Do you wish to participate?   Do you agree to be audio-taped?
Record Subject's Response: ☐ Yes ☐ No   Record Subject's Response: ☐ Yes ☐ No

_____
Printed Name of Person Consenting

_____   _____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   Date

Appendix F: Teacher Strategy Interview Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview to help me collect information on teacher-student relationships (TSRs) with students with emotional disabilities (EDs). For the purpose of this study, *teacher-student relationship* (TSR) is defined as interactions between teachers and students that are important part of development for both teacher and student and *school experience* is defined as the development across social, emotional, behavioral, and academic areas. I will ask each question as stated. Based upon your responses, follow-up probes may be asked.

1. Icebreaker: Tell me a little bit about what you do, what level you teach, how many years of experience you have, and who you are.

2. What strategies do you use when working with students with emotional disabilities to address social situations?

3. What strategies do you use when working with students with emotional disabilities to address behavioral challenges?

4. What strategies do you use when working with students with emotional disabilities to address academic challenges?

5. How do you think the teacher-student relationship is connected with the strategies you described (socially/behaviorally/academically)?

6. How do you think the physical classroom environment is connected with the strategies you described (socially/academically/behaviorally) and teacher-student relationships?

7. What advice or recommendations would you like to give to school administrators related to the strategies you described when working with students with emotional disabilities?

8. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you for participating in the interview to help the researcher explore the K-12 TSR by identifying strategies that influence the social, academic, and behavior school experiences for

students with emotional disabilities. A copy of the transcribed interview will be sent to you for approval.

Appendix G: Interviewee Transcription Verification Form

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Verification and Consent Form

Date:_____

Please see the attached copy of the transcription of our interview conducted on _____.

Please read the transcript and choose one of the options below.

After you have completed this form by marking option 1 or option 2, please sign and return via email. If I, Turonne Hunt, do not receive the form within a week of the date printed above, the information will be included in the study.

Thank you.

Turonne Hunt

Option 1:

I have read the transcription of our interview and agree that it can be used in its current state.
Option 2:

I have read the transcription of our interview and would like the following additions or corrections to be made before moving forward.

Corrections or additions:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Interviewee Signature   Date

Appendix H: IRB Approval Letter

VΓ **VIRGINIA TECH.**

**Division of Scholarly Integrity and
Research Compliance**
Institutional Review Board
North End Center, Suite 4120 (MC 0497)
300 Turner Street NW
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
540/231-3732
irb@vt.edu
http://www.research.vt.edu/sirc/hrpp

MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 13, 2020

TO: Carol Ann Mullen, Turonne Kalada Hunt

FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires October 29, 2024)

PROTOCOL TITLE: Exploring the K-12 Teacher-Student Relationship: Strategies Teachers Use to Influence Students With Emotional Disabilities’ School Experiences

IRB NUMBER: 20-765

Effective October 13, 2020, the Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) determined that this protocol meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review under 45 CFR 46.104 (d) category(ies) 2(ii).

Ongoing IRB review and approval by this organization is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities impact the exempt determination, please submit an amendment to the HRPP for a determination.

This exempt determination does not apply to any collaborating institution(s). The Virginia Tech HRPP and IRB cannot provide an exemption that overrides the jurisdiction of a local IRB or other institutional mechanism for determining exemptions.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

https://secure.research.vt.edu/external/irb/responsibilities.htm

(Please review responsibilities before beginning your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Determined As: **Exempt, under 45 CFR 46.104(d) category(ies) 2(ii)**
Protocol Determination Date: **October 13, 2020**

ASSOCIATED FUNDING:

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this protocol, if required.

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Date*	OSP Number	Sponsor	Grant Comparison Conducted?

* Date this proposal number was compared, assessed as not requiring comparison, or comparison information was revised.

If this protocol is to cover any other grant proposals, please contact the HRPP office (irb@vt.edu) immediately.