

Exploring the Professional Responsibilities of Educators in Special Day Schools
Serving Secondary Students with Emotional Disabilities

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ABSTRACT

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004) requires a free appropriate public education (FAPE) for students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE) with access to the general curriculum. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) emphasizes academic achievement for all students in public schools, and the use of challenging assessments to improve the quality of instruction. Because students with emotional disabilities (ED) are more likely to attend special day schools outside of the public school setting, and less likely to be instructed in general education classrooms (U.S. Department of Education, 2006), the professional responsibilities of teachers within special day schools must be addressed. The researcher examined the professional responsibilities and professional needs of teachers in special day schools, and how their administrators support them. Data were collected through a qualitative design using focus group methodology. Major findings that emerged regarding professional responsibilities were categorized as (a) knowing content, (b) designing instruction, (c) assessing student learning, (d) monitoring student behavior, (e) communicating with parents and agencies, and (f) remaining current through professional practices. Findings regarding the professional needs of teachers included improved professional development practices, and administrative support. Data revealed that teachers believed their administrators support them when they provide performance

appraisal and offer opportunities for collegial support and collaboration. The findings suggest that (a) most of these special day school teachers were non-traditionally prepared special educators; (b) these teachers were challenged in achieving and maintaining instructional focus; (c) despite multiple challenges they were highly motivated; and (d) were provided insufficient instructional support. Considering the current national trend regarding the improvement of academic performance for all students, high stakes assessment, and accountability, more attention should be paid to preparing teachers in private day school for academic programs while still addressing the behavioral, social, and emotional needs of students. Joint participation in professional development activities would be beneficial and welcomed by these private day school teachers.

DEDICATION

Dedicated to the memory of my loving mother, Dolores Zivkovich, whose smile always made me happy. In life and in death she gave me strength and hope.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Educational leaders and practitioners for children with disabilities have concentrated on the intricate procedures and legal requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1997). With the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), there has been a cultural movement from special education compliance to curricular and instructional practices and assessment of academic student outcomes. Although accountability for student learning in public schools is recognized, very little has been documented in the literature regarding how this shift has applied to the education of students in private school placements (Byrnes, 2004).

Students identified with emotional disabilities (ED) in particular, may require specialized programs that are more restrictive than those in the regular school setting (Kauffman, Bantz, & McCullough, 2002). Placement in private day schools is often in response to challenging behaviors, severe emotional and academic issues, or other actions that result in suspension or expulsion from public schools (Gable, Hendrickson, Tonelson, & Van Acker, 2002). Teachers providing instruction to students with ED within private programs are challenged to help their students address state academic standards, as are their colleagues within public school programs. Studies addressing the professional responsibilities and professional growth opportunities of teachers in private day school are lacking. Consequently, this study will focus on how teachers in special day schools characterize their professional responsibilities, professional needs, and how their administrators support them.

Statement of the Problem

In the 26th *Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (U.S. Department of Education, 2006) approximately 474,000 youth in the United States are receiving special education and related services under the category of ED. Academic underachievement is one of the key characteristics of students with ED, and these students are more likely to receive educational services in special day schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Professional development practices of teachers play a key role in the academic achievement of students and have been a long-standing function in public education in the United States. Professional development has evolved over time, is conducted in many formats, and is applicable to teachers of all students, including teachers of students with ED in the public and private school sector (Marzano, 2003). The study addresses the professional responsibilities, needs, and supports of teachers in special day schools for students with ED.

The IDEA mandated that eligible students with disabilities receive a “free appropriate public education” in the “least restrictive environment” (§1401(d)(1)(A)). The IDEA emphasized the provision of supports and services to enhance effective participation in the general education curriculum. Issues of accountability regarding the collection and reporting of data are present. States are required to institute performance goals for students with disabilities as they would for students without disabilities (20 U.S.C. § 1412(a)(16)(A)). State and district-wide assessment procedures were required to include students with disabilities unless it was determined that the severity of their disability would prevent them from participation (20 U.S.C. § 1412(a)(17)(A)).

A continuum of placements and service delivery options is available to students with disabilities. Within a regular school setting options include the general education classroom with support, services in resource rooms, self-contained programs, and the availability of related services necessary to benefit from the selected special education program. For students with the most significant disabilities, programs in locations outside of the traditional school or classroom are necessary (Kauffman, 2001). Students with ED are more likely than students with any other disability under the IDEA, to be placed in special day and residential schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Within such schools curriculum has focused on individualized goals and objectives rather than the general curriculum, often leading to lowered expectations (Nolet & McLaughlin, 2000). Special schools have traditionally emphasized modifying behavior and providing social skills instruction as opposed to providing a strong academic foundation (Gagnon & McLaughlin, 2004). Private schools have operated with a high degree of autonomy and often with limited policies, procedures, and instructional accountability (Dryfoos, 1991).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001(NCLB) emphasized the provision of high quality education for all students. This legislation underscored the requirement that students with disabilities must be educated and assessed in the general curriculum. The use of challenging high-stakes assessments holds educators, schools, and school divisions accountable for the performance of all students (20 U.S.C. § 6301). The utilization of a high-stakes testing approach is intended to improve the quality of instruction and to provide states with data that hold school divisions accountable for student performance through higher test scores. According to S. Loving-Ryder,

Assistant Superintendent for Assessment and Reporting, Virginia Department of Education, test scores of students with disabilities placed by school divisions in private day schools are assigned or coded to the local school divisions (personal communication, November 5, 2004). As a consequence, directors of special education have a vested interest in knowing more about how private programs are fostering effective instruction for their students with ED.

Need for the Study

Special day schools continue to emerge to provide academic, behavioral, and emotional support to students with ED (Leone & Drakeford, 1999). These schools are highly structured, specialized programs that offer individualized instruction and support in academic, social, behavioral, and emotional areas. Low student-to-teacher ratios, highly trained staff, and the provision of specialized instruction based on students' IEPs, are characteristics specific to day schools in Virginia (Virginia's Private Special Education Day Schools, 2003). Special education teachers in private day schools are not held to the same "highly qualified standards" identified in the recent reauthorization of the IDEA, as teachers in public schools, and the school divisions that place the students are accountable for student outcomes (S. Loving-Ryder, personal communication, November 5, 2004).

Content Standards developed by The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and approved by The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) are used in teacher preparation programs for special education teachers. It is expected that teachers of ED students in special day schools will have the knowledge skills in specific areas of specialization to ensure that the Content Standards are met.

Performance-based standards specific to teachers endorsed in the area of ED include knowledge and skill acquisition through the following standards: (1) foundations, (2) development and characteristics of learners, (3) individual learning differences, (4) instructional strategies, (5) learning environments, social interactions, (6) instructional planning, (7) assessment, (8) professional and ethical practice and, (9) collaboration. Special day schools should ensure that their teaching staff addresses each of the content standards as well as those performance-based standards specific to emotional/behavioral disorders.

The success of students in private day schools is dependent on the knowledge, skills, and abilities of special education teachers as well as the retention of qualified teachers. Special education teacher shortage and attrition has jeopardized the ability to provide well-trained faculty to meet the needs of students with ED. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported 67% of public middle and high schools in 1999-2000 had vacancies in special education. The estimated annual attrition rate for special education teachers is between 9% and 10%, as compared to 6% among educators in other areas (Teacher Recruitment and Retention Act, 2003).

A higher level of attrition exists among uncertified special education teachers than certified teachers and ED teachers were the least qualified special educators in public schools and lacked basic certification in ED (Billingsley, Fall, and Williams, 2006). A 50% turnover rate exists among teachers of students with ED, while 50% are not fully licensed. Therefore ED teachers on provisional or temporary certificates are considered high risk of leaving the field, and are in need of professional support (Billingsley & McLeskey, 2004).

Within the growing national teacher shortage in all certification areas, the ongoing burnout of special education teachers has become a significant liability in the provision of appropriate educational services to students with ED in special day schools. A national survey of over 1,000 special educators conducted by CEC concluded: “Poor teacher working conditions contribute to the high rate of special educators leaving the field, teacher burnout, and substandard quality of education for students with special needs” (CEC 1998). Billingsley (2003) indicated the career decisions of special educators are often influenced by external factors and included factors pertaining to employment such as professional qualifications, environmental conditions, rewards, and commitments to the school, district, and teaching profession. Billingsley suggested that when “professional qualifications and work conditions are not as favorable, teachers are likely to experience fewer rewards and thus reduced commitment” (p. 26). Addressing professional responsibilities and professional development of teachers in day schools is essential in that it links to the adequate delivery of instruction and positive student outcomes (Marzano, 2003).

These circumstances beg the following question: How are the professional responsibilities of teachers in private day schools enhanced in order to ensure that the educational needs of students with ED are being met? Studies addressing professional responsibilities of teachers in special schools were absent from the literature. With an increased emphasis on student learning, improved outcomes, higher standards, and attrition of special education teachers, it is necessary to examine how teachers who are removed from the typical public school environment characterize their professional responsibilities and opportunities for growth and development.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of the study was to examine how educators in private day schools serving secondary students with ED characterized their professional responsibilities, opportunities for professional growth, and support. Professional responsibilities are broadly defined as activities assumed outside of the classroom rarely observed by students and parents, but critical to enhancing the teaching profession. It is also described as the manner in which teachers approach their work, interact with colleagues, communicate with families and outside agencies, and participate and sequence professional development activities (Marzano, 2003). The questions guiding the study were: (a) How do special educators in special day schools describe their professional responsibilities, (b) how do they describe their professional needs, and (c) how are their professional needs supported?

Conceptual Framework

Students with challenging behaviors require effective instruction that engages them in learning and facilitates frequent success (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Teachers are required to demonstrate the success of their students through state content standards. Danielson (1996) suggested the use of an instructional framework to elevate the professional practices of novice and veteran teachers. This framework was derived from Madeline Hunter's work in theory-based research where the establishment of relationships in teaching and improved student achievement was desired. This framework revealed a constructivist approach that allowed for individual differences among teachers depending on experiences, knowledge, and cognitive structure. Hunter's model comprised teaching practices designed to improve teacher decision-making

resulting in increased student learning (Danielson & McGreal, 2000). Hunter's work established the significant role teachers have in student learning. The fourth domain of Danielson's (1996) framework is used to guide the present study.

Danielson's (1996) framework separates the skill of teaching into four broad realms of activity, or domains that comprised the structure for teaching and learning. The fourth domain emphasizes the professional responsibilities of teachers that provide the linkage to this inquiry. A review of the research base regarding Danielson's framework involved "extensive surveys of research literature, consultation with expert practitioners and researchers, wide-ranging job analyses, summaries of the demands of state licensing programs, and field work" (p. 120). According to Nougaret (2002), "Danielson revealed the framework had been utilized by a number of school districts in an evaluative/professional growth capacity. She noted that a high level of inter-rater agreement (p. 8) was consistently achieved when observations were preceded by a thorough training component" (p. 69). The framework aligns with the Praxis III criteria developed by the Educational Testing Service that is not specific to special education, however the fundamental components found in the model are consistent across all forms of education. The framework "embodies a number of features that ensure its applicability to a wide range of instructional settings" (Nougaret, Schruggs, & Mastroperi, 2004, p. 14).

The first domain described in Danielson's (1996) framework was Planning and Preparation and included six components that described a distinct aspect of the domain including: (a) knowledge of content and pedagogy, (b) knowledge of students, (c) selection of instructional goals, (d) knowledge of resources, (e) designing of coherent

instruction, and (f) assessment of student learning. This domain addressed all aspects of instructional planning starting with an understanding of the subject matter as well as knowledge of students' interests, skills, abilities, and experiences they bring to a classroom. Planning, sequencing, and determination of activities and exercises to meet described instructional goals were addressed. This domain examined the criteria and standards of assessment and the correspondence with instructional goals identified through the instructional planning process. Danielson discussed the teacher's role in securing knowledge of the students' approaches to learning and changes necessary during instruction in response to the students' behaviors and desires. Danielson stated the importance of planning for evaluation and utilizing multiple and alternative types of assessments that allow for a precise and inclusive representation of student progress.

The second domain titled Classroom Environment described a setting that "promotes respect, rapport, and a positive culture for learning. Consistent projection of positive expectations, attributes, and social labels is important in fostering positive self-concept" (p. 125). Six components addressed distinct aspects of the environment and included: (a) creating an environment of respect and rapport, (b) establishing a culture for learning, (c) managing classroom procedures, (d) managing student behavior and, (e) organizing physical space. This domain included all non-instructional and interpersonal interactions, expectations for learning, classroom rules, routines, procedures, and monitoring of student behavior as features of the classroom environment.

Instruction was the third domain in Danielson's framework and described as the interaction of the students and the instructional content by way of the teacher actively engaging the students in learning, presenting feedback regarding their progress, utilizing

effective teaching techniques, and communicating with precision. Distinct aspects of the provision of instruction included: (a) communicating clearly and accurately, (b) using questioning and discussion techniques, (c) engaging students in learning, (d) providing feedback to students and, (e) demonstrating flexibility and responsiveness. The elements of each instructional component were specific to the types of questioning, quality of feedback to students, selected activities and assignments, student grouping, pacing of instruction, and adjusting for individual differences.

Professional Responsibilities was the fourth area of the framework. Through this domain the data from this study will be filtered. This domain included six components that were associated with a wide range of professional roles primarily outside of the classroom setting. The components were considered essential to the development and endorsement of the teaching profession and included: (a) reflecting on teaching, (b) maintaining accurate records, (c) communicating with families, (d) contributing to the school and district, (e) growing and developing professionally, and (f) showing professionalism. These components were considered to be outside of the “technical” realm of teaching, but contribute greatly to enhancing teacher performance and student achievement.

Overview of Methodology

Focus group methodology was used for the study to obtain diverse perspectives from the participants. The moderator facilitated the three focus group interviews with private day school teachers of ED students, as they were audio taped and later transcribed verbatim. At the conclusion of each focus group discussion, the participants summarized key concepts of the conversation with an assistant moderator. Field notes

were taken and used as a second source of data along with relevant documents from each school. Data from the three sources were organized and analyzed through a constant comparison model (Maycut, & Morehouse, 1994), and included grouping and revealing themes within and across established categories (Yin, 2003). Through continuous analysis the data revealed how teachers in private day schools characterized their professional responsibilities, opportunities for professional growth, and support from their administrators.

Delimitations/Limitations

The data collected through focus group interviews, field notes, and a review of documents possess certain limitations. Data collected through group interviews are verbal self-reports from the participants and include biases and predispositions that may influence the data brought forth. Participants may have poor recall, and limited or poor articulation of the topic. Yin (2003) recommended more probing by the researcher if this occurs, and citing the details of the situation for future analysis. Precautions taken to avoid researcher bias are discussed in Chapter 3.

The inquiry focused on teachers in three private day schools in Virginia, and was limited to teachers of students with ED. Therefore, the transferability of the results of the study is limited to schools and participants with similar features as judged by the reader. A rich description of the findings will be provided in Chapter 4 to allow the reader to make a decision regarding the transferability of the results to their situation.

Definition of Terms

The following terms will be used as they apply to the study:

Effective instruction is a broad concept that relates to systematic instruction that consistently leads to achievement considered critical for future success. Based on process-product literature, support of effective instruction focuses on teacher behaviors related to instructional activities (Cohen, 1986).

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) emphasizes special education and related services that—(A) have been provided at public expense, under public supervision and direction, and without charge; (B) meet the standards of the State educational agency; (C) include an appropriate preschool, elementary, or secondary school education in the State involved, and; (D) are provided in conformity with the individualized education program (IDEA, 2004, §602(8)(A-D)).

Functional behavioral assessment is a procedure designed to find out why a student exhibits problem behavior including a determination of antecedents and consequences (Kauffman, 2001).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a special education law with the purpose to “ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for employment and independent living” (20 U.S.C. § 1400(d)(1)(A)). In addition, it ensures that the rights of students with disabilities and their parents are protected (20 U.S.C. § 1400(d)(1)(C)) and that parents and educators are provided the tools needed to meet the needs of students with disabilities (20 U.S.C. § 1400(d)(3)).

Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) are “a written statement for each child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in accordance with this section” (20 U.S.C. § 1414(d)(1)(A)).

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) refers to the level of services that is most appropriate for the student while providing the most integration with non-disabled students (Bateman & Linden, 1998).

Psychological services means (a) administering psychological and educational tests, and other assessment procedures; (b) interpreting assessment results; (c) obtaining, integrating, and interpreting information about child behavior and conditions relating to learning; (d) with other staff members in planning school programs to meet the special needs of children as indicated by psychological tests, interviews, and behavioral evaluations; (e) planning and managing a program of psychological services, including psychological counseling for children and parents; and (f) assisting in developing positive behavioral intervention strategies (20 U.S.C. § 300.34(c)(10)).

Social work services in schools includes: (a) preparing a social or developmental history on a child with a disability; (b) group and individual counseling with the child and family; (c) working in partnership with parents and others on those problems in a child’s living situation (home, school, and community) that affect the child’s adjustment in school; (d) mobilizing school and community resources to enable the child to learn as effectively as possible in his or her educational program; and (e) assisting in developing positive behavioral intervention strategies (20 U.S.C. § 300.34(c)(14)).

Special day schools are privately operated programs that provide academic, social, behavioral, and emotional support services to students with ED in a highly structured separate school facility (Bateman & Linden, 1998).

Special education is defined as “specifically designed instruction, at no cost to parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability” (20 U.S.C. § 1401(25)).

Students with Emotional disabilities have a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child’s educational performance:(a) an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors; (b) an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers; (c) inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances; (d) a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; (e) a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems. The term includes schizophrenia. The term does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance (34CFR §300.7(c) (4)).

Significance of the Study

In 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), Public Law 94-142 mandated that students with disabilities be provided specialized services and access to public schools and programs. Following revisions in 1990 the law was renamed the IDEA, and the federal regulation stated “a continuum of services is available to meet the needs of children with disabilities for special education and related services and provide supplementary services to be provided in conjunction with regular class placement” (34 CFR 300.551 (a) (b)).

Section 300.519 of the Code of the Federal Regulations to the IDEA addressed changes of placement for disciplinary removals and clarified that after a child with a disability has been removed from a placement for more than 10 school days in the same school year, the school division must provide services to the extent necessary during any subsequent days of removal. With this mandate public school officials were faced with the responsibility of providing sufficient program options to students who did not adjust to the demands of the general education setting.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) mandated increased accountability for all students and “ensures that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments” (20 U.S.C. § 6301). Meeting the educational needs of children with ED served in special day schools is no exception.

The National Education Goals Panel (1999) concluded, “by the year 2000, every school in America will be free of drugs and violence and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning” (p. 2). In response to this national initiative, state and local leaders focused on creating safer school environments. State educational agencies established more rigid Codes of Conduct, and school administrators implemented discipline practices that included suspension and expulsion from school.

The Safe and Drug-Free School and Communities Act (U.S. Department of Education, 1994) provided Virginia school divisions with legislative intervention for grant funding to assist in the development and implementation of alternative programs for the prevention of alcohol and drug abuse, violence, or disruptive behavior, while

encouraging parental involvement. The act encouraged interagency collaboration among school divisions and agencies such as law enforcement, mental health providers, and substance abuse professionals. It also called for the establishment of advisory councils to distribute information about preventive programs, and advised the local school divisions about the coordination of available programs (U.S. Department of Education, 1994).

The National Staff Development Council standards for professional development provide direction professional development opportunities that ensure educators acquire the necessary knowledge and skills. The standards reflect results-driven, standards-based, and job-embedded professional development opportunities. Revisions to the standards addressed the following guiding questions: (1) What are all students expected to know and be able to do? (2) What must teachers know and do in order to ensure student success? (3) Where must staff development focus to meet both goals? (National Staff Development Council, 2003) The relationship between student outcomes and professional practices of teachers is significant (Marzano, 2003). There is emphasis on student learning, improved outcomes, and higher standards in all settings including private day schools. Therefore it was necessary to examine how teachers characterize their professional responsibilities, opportunities for growth, and how their administrators support them.

Overview of the Study

I examined how special educators in private day schools serving secondary students with ED characterized their professional responsibilities, opportunities for professional growth, and how teachers characterized their level and type of support from their administrators. Data were collected through focus groups, field notes, and a review

of documents. Chapter 2 provides a review of professional literature and analysis of four studies organized through Danielson's (1996) framework for enhancing professional practices. The studies addressing planning and preparation, classroom environment, provision of instruction in ED programs were analyzed as a backdrop leading up to an analysis of studies regarding the professional responsibilities of ED teachers. Chapter 2 concludes with a summary of professional commentary regarding professional responsibilities of special educators. In Chapter 3 I described the qualitative methodology used in the study, including an explanation of the study's design, participant selection, data collection and management processes, and data analysis procedures. Chapter 4 provides a description of the results, and Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the conclusions, implications, recommendations for practice, and opportunities for future research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter contains a collection of related literature associated with the professional practices within schools or programs for students with ED. Issues associated with identification, characteristics, placement options, and programming for students with ED will be discussed. Danielson's (1996) conceptual framework of professional practice will provide the lens through which related studies are organized and analyzed. The collection of studies was selected from published journal articles, unpublished reports, and documents. Three primary databases were used in the literature search. Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) was used predominantly for unpublished research, reports and documents, and journal articles. Searches of psycINFO produced results from psychological journal articles, dissertations, and books. Descriptors used to locate studies pertaining to professional practices in special day schools for students with ED included the following terms: emotional disabilities, behavior disorders, special education, special day schools, and effective instruction.

Background of the Problem

Since the enactment of the IDEA school administrators have focused their attention on the procedural aspects of implementing the law and have not concentrated on providing quality instruction to students with ED (Lane, Gresham, & O'Shaughnessy, 2002). Teachers have placed strong emphasis on behavior management, social and emotional issues, and conflict resolution with much less focus on instruction (Knitzer, Steinberg, & Fleisch, 1990). As a result students with ED generally receive inadequate instruction and achieve poor educational outcomes (Lane et al., 2002). Special day

programs for students with ED tend to vary in their structure, interventions, and program goals (Rutherford & Quinn, 1998). Significant gaps in knowledge and skills will likely occur if a lack of quality or consistent instruction exists in the core curriculum. Having a comprehensive curriculum that addresses the social, behavioral, emotional, and academic needs is vital to the long-term positive outcomes for students with ED (U.S. Department of Education, 1994). For students in special day schools the focus on quality instruction is also essential to the transition back to a typical school setting.

There has been much discussion among educators and mental health professionals regarding the identification and provision of services for children and youth with ED. Operational definitions of “emotional disturbance” varied among the social agencies that addressed the behaviors of children and youth (Kauffman, Bantz, & McCullough, 2002). The practice of identification itself was often viewed as harmful in that children were stigmatized, expectations were lowered, or difficulties arose in removing or modifying a label once a student was identified (Forness, Kavate, King, & Kasari, 1994).

Bowers constructed the most widely used definition in 1981, although identification rates among and within states varied considerably (Kauffman, 2002). After having been modified and adopted by the U.S. Department of Education for use by school systems nation-wide, the definition read as follows:

Emotionally disturbed means a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects educational performance:

1. An inability to learn which cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors;
2. An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers;
3. Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances;
4. A general, pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; or
5. A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

The term includes schizophrenia. The term does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance. (20 U.S.C. § 1401(3)(A) and (B); 1401(26))

Under this definition children identified exclusively as socially maladjusted, which may also be defined as oppositional defiant disorder or conduct disorder, were not eligible for special education services under the category of ED unless it was determined that the student also had ED (IDEA, 20 U.S.C., 1997). No federal definition of social maladjustment existed. Forness and Knitzer (1992) concluded that this often led to the ineligibility of students for special education based on subjective interpretation of a definition and the categorization of student behaviors.

The National Mental Health and Special Education Coalition proposed a definition in 1997 that read as follows:

1. The term emotional or behavioral disorder means a disability characterized by behavioral or emotional responses in school programs so different from appropriate age, cultural, or ethnic norms that they adversely affect educational

performance, including academic, social, vocational, or personal skills, and which (a) is more than a temporary, expected response to stressful events in the environment; (b) is consistently exhibited in two different settings, at least one of which is school-related and; (c) persists despite individualized interventions within the education program, unless, in the judgment of the team, the child's or youth's history indicates that such interventions would not be effective.

2. Emotional or behavioral disorders can co-exist with other disabilities.

This category may include children or youth with schizophrenic disorders, affective disorders, anxiety disorder, or other sustained disturbances of conduct, or adjustment when they adversely affect educational performance. (Forness & Knitzer, 1992, p.13)

By acknowledging behavior disorders and other mental health conditions that are not currently recognized, the endorsement of this definition would likely increase the identification of students eligible for ED services. The programming and placement of these students may include special day schools and programs outside of the traditional school setting. It is likely that there will continue to be disagreement among professionals regarding a universal definition used for the identification of students with ED.

Issues Related to ED

This portion of the chapter will address issues associated with identification, characteristics, placement options, and programming for students with ED. Descriptions of special day schools available in Virginia for secondary school students with ED will be provided in the following section.

Identification of ED

Based on the *24th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (U.S. Department of Education, 2002) there was a slight decrease of 1.9% in the overall percentage of eligible students with ED between 1990-1991 and 1999-2000 when compared with reports from 1991-1992 and 2000-2001. Other data suggested that too few students were identified for services. In an epidemiological study of at-risk delinquent youth Cox (1999) suggested 8-12 % of incarcerated youth had symptoms significant enough to warrant psychological intervention. Three percent to 5 % were estimated as having very serious disabilities but yet were not identified as ED. The *26th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (U.S. Department of Education, 2006) showed an increase in the number of students with ED from the *24th Annual Report*. Approximately 474,000 youth in the United States are receiving special education and related services under the category of ED.

Characteristics of ED

The diverse characteristics of children with ED result in academic and behavioral difficulties with varying degrees of severity that are typically incompatible with the routines and guidelines of classrooms. Characteristics include impulsive, disruptive, and aggressive behaviors. Observable behaviors relating to the characteristics include but are not limited to fighting, tantrumming, crying, self-injurious behaviors, refusal to respond to others, and excessive fears or worries. Problem behaviors that primarily affect the individual student are referred to as internalizing problem behaviors. Examples of such behaviors are loneliness, depression, and chronic sadness. Deficits in ability to exhibit

self-control and insufficiencies in cognitive, social, and problem-solving skill areas are often apparent (Gable et al., 2002). Some children and youth with ED have difficulty evaluating and appropriately responding to various social situations. They may misread social cues among peers and adults, and subsequently become embarrassed, confused, or angry. When coupled with frustration, fear, anger, or other emotions, negative encounters with peers and adults are expected, and over time inappropriate behaviors are likely to reoccur (Maag, 1998). Children with the most serious ED may exhibit disordered thinking, excessive anxiety, unusual motor acts, and abnormal mood swings. Some are identified as children who have severe psychosis or schizophrenia (Kauffman, 2001).

The causes of ED have not been adequately determined although various factors such as heredity, brain disorder, social stressors, and family functioning have been suggested as possible causes. The literature however has not shown any of these factors to be the direct cause of ED (Koplewicz, 1997).

Children with these characteristics are regarded as more difficult to teach than children with other types of problems or disabilities and are often recommended for removal from general education settings (Gunter & Denny, 1998). Children who do not have ED who are served in special day schools may present some of these behaviors at various times during development, however when children have ED, these behaviors continue over long periods of time

Placement of Students with ED

The prevalence of students with ED varies significantly from state to state and among local school divisions (Kauffman, 2001). The determination of where to serve the

students continues to elicit much discussion. The percentage of students ages 6 years through 21 years with disabilities receiving instruction in general education classes has continually increased. Ninety-six percent of all students with disabilities were educated in regular schools during the 1999-2000 school year. During the 1998-99 school year, 2.9 % of students with disabilities were educated in separate day schools; 0.7 % were educated in residential facilities; and 0.5 % were educated in home/hospital environments (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

Students with ED however, were more often educated in special classrooms or separate facilities and less likely to be educated in general education classrooms when compared to students with other disabilities. Services offered in general education were considered limited when compared to comprehensive educational, behavioral, and psychological services typically exist in special day schools (Lane et al., 2002).

The least restrictive environment (LRE) refers to the setting in which a student most benefits from instruction. The LRE principle from the legal aspect is defined as follows:

To the maximum extent appropriate children with disabilities including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not disabled, and special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular education environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of the child is such that education in regular classes and with the use of supplementary aid and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (20 U.S.C. § 1412(a)(5)(A)).

Determination of the LRE is a salient component of all placement decisions made by IEP teams. The IDEA requires school divisions to make available a continuum of placement options based on the individual needs of each student. Placement options include but are not limited to the general classroom with support through accommodations and consultative services, resource programs, self-contained classrooms, separate day schools, residential facilities, and home-based services. Students may move among placements to meet their individual needs as indicated in the IEP. The least restrictive setting for the child may include any, or a combination of the environments indicated in Figure 1.

General Education with Support is the first option in the continuum of services for students with disabilities. The general curriculum is taught throughout the duration of the school day with instructional accommodations and modifications implemented as indicated in each student's IEP. The types of curricular accommodations provided relate to presentation of information, practice with content, and multiple evaluation methods to suit the individual needs of each student (Cohen, 1986). General educators may or may not have direct assistance from special educators in implementing the necessary accommodations in the regular classroom. The significance of each child's disability will determine the level of support required.

Resource services include instructional support and direct teaching provided by special education staff to students with disabilities for less than 50% of their school day. The time that a child receives special education services is determined on the basis of specialized instruction described in the IEP as opposed to the location of services. A

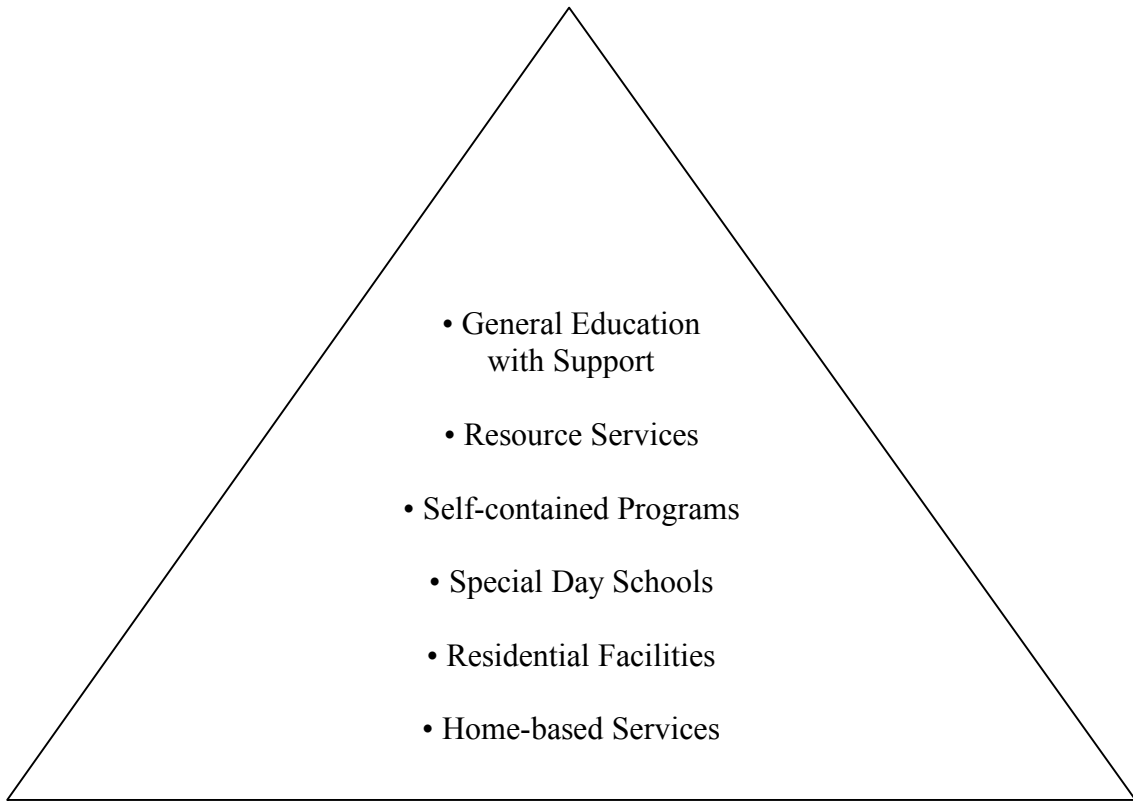


Figure 1. Continuum of Placement Options. Adapted from Virginia Department of Education, Handbook for Parents, 2000.

student may receive all or a portion of specialized instruction in a general education classroom, special education classroom, or a combination of both.

Self-contained programs are more restrictive settings for students with disabilities in that students are removed from the general classroom for more than 50% of their school day to receive specialized instruction from special education staff. There is an expectation in self-contained programs that 1) alternative approaches to teaching are apparent, 2) lower student to teacher ratios exist, and 3) modifications to the curriculum are observed. Students with more significant ED may be placed in such program models when their behavior or emotional status inhibits their ability to cope and meet with success within the regular classroom.

Special day schools are privately operated programs that are available to students removed from the public school programs for a portion or all of the school day. Licensed facilities have separate administrative units and are required to meet the same personnel and programming standards as the local public school divisions. Responsibility for compliance with the provisions of IDEA and Virginia Special Education Regulations remains with the local school division for children placed in private special education facilities (Virginia Department of Education, 2002).

Special day schools are designed to create positive learning environments through low teacher-to-student ratios and by providing highly structured individualized instruction and support in academic, social, behavioral, and emotional areas. The direct teaching of social problem solving is a feature of special day programs for preventing and resolving discipline problems, avoiding conflict, coping with anxiety and stress, and

treating antisocial behavior (Kazdin, 1994).

There are 66 private day schools licensed in Virginia. There is variance among the schools relating to the population served, capacity, grades and ages of students, number of staff, duration of the school year, and accreditation status. Forty-eight facilities serve students with ED in kindergarten through grade 12. Table 1 represents a profile of 12 special day schools in Virginia that each serve a minimum of 50 secondary students with ED (Virginia's Private Special Education Day Schools, 2003).

In addition to general program characteristics, programming and service availability varies among facilities for students with ED. Of the 12 facilities for secondary students with ED, the most common program descriptors include: (a) social skills curriculum, (b) counseling services, (c) psychological services, (d) crisis intervention, and (e) family supports. All 12 of the facilities specify low student-to-teacher ratios, highly trained staff, provision of individualized instruction based on IEPs, highly structured environment, and a focus on students' transition back to community schools. Career and technical training, computer instruction, reading programs, drug and alcohol counseling, and community linkages appear as secondary offerings within the programs (Virginia's Private Special Education Day Schools, 2003).

There has been increasing pressure on school divisions to fully include all students in regular classrooms. However, CEC and the Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders (CCBD) have supported the full continuum of placement options (Kauffman, 2001). Education outside of the general classroom setting is supported when more intensive, individualized instruction is required and when instruction in skill areas already mastered or not necessary by non-disabled students are needed. The quality of

Table 1

Profile of Private Day School Options in Virginia for Students with ED with Student Enrollment of 50 Students or Greater, 2004-2005

School	Capacity	Grade Levels
Accotink Academy	195	Ungraded
Crawford Day School	70	K-12
Cumberland Academy	100	K-12
Dominion School	50	9-12
Crawford Day School	70	K-12
Cumberland Academy	100	K-12
Dominion School	50	9-12
Dooley School- St. Joseph's Villa	130	K-12
Educational Development Center	125	K-12
Elk Hill Farm-Richmond	50	5-12
Keller School	60	K-12
Leary School	130	K-12
Metropolitan Day School	80	K-12
Oak Valley Center	60	2-12
Phillips School	198	K-12

instruction is of critical importance and not necessarily the location of the instruction.

When making decisions regarding the appropriateness and restrictiveness of a program or special facility, it is necessary for IEP teams to consider the severity of the disability,

and the attitudes, values, and richness associated with such programs (Knitzer et al., 1990).

Programming for Students with ED

At the Schoolhouse Door (Knitzer, Steinberg, & Fleish), a 1990 national study focused on programs and services for students with ED and for those who were not identified as ED but exhibited challenging behaviors. Program leaders from across the country identified special day schools and self-contained classrooms for participation in the national study that they determined to be effective program models. The study was based on two national surveys completed by state special education directors and mental health officials, site visits to 26 programs in 13 states, reviews of program documents and pertinent policy literature, phone interviews with staff of over 130 programs across the country, and responses to a questionnaire by 200 parents of ED students. Although the study is over 10 years old, the findings were significant in that the programs that were studied were considered less than adequate in meeting the needs of students with ED. It was also determined that programming for students with ED caused disruptions and inconvenience to a large body of students and staff in the regular school setting, thus justifying the removal as a better option (Knitzer et al., 1990).

Walker, Severson, and Feil (1994) described the type of support provided in their work to all students as a developmental movement from preventive interventions and accommodations, to separate and more intense programs. In the early preschool years through third grade efforts were made to remove the conditions under which the behaviors were most likely to occur. This occurred by implementing literacy, discipline, or social skills programs school-wide, with typically 80 % of the population expected to

respond favorably to the interventions while 20 % of the population was likely to need additional support. This type of support included smaller groups of students addressing such issues as anger management, social skill development, or academic remediation. An even smaller portion of the total student population, 5% -7 %, required more intensive interventions such as functional behavioral assessment, individual counseling, literacy or other academic programs. The needs of students with ED were considered within this small portion of the total school population with the likelihood of even further, more intensive instructional, behavioral, and emotional supports and services necessary outside of the regular school setting. These services may include psychological, social work, or counseling services, career education, and family support such as respite care, intensive case management, and a collaborative approach to community services.

Knitzer et al. (1990) concluded that the ED programs relied excessively on behavior management systems that were based on the manipulation of consequences and included token economy and point systems as well as punitive outcomes. Emphasis was often on behavioral management with very little attention given to academic instructional practices. The heavy dependence on such systems resulted in classrooms that were intimidating and ineffective in the development of more adaptive student repertoires. They lacked mental health components, limited family involvement, and inadequate support for transitions of students to less restrictive placements.

In response to this study, researchers began to explore the efficacy of approaches that sought to prevent and replace problem behaviors by conducting functional behavioral assessments. As a result of such assessments, positive behavioral support

strategies focused on the determination of interventions that were more amenable to the preferences and initiatives of the students themselves. Positive behavioral support is a school-wide approach to implementing and sustaining the use of effective practices to prevention designed to enhance the capacity of schools to educate all students, especially students with problem behaviors resulting in academic and social failure (Sugai, Horner, & Sprague, 1999).

For students with challenging behaviors, positive behavioral supports aided in the prevention of many predictable behavioral problems that typically begin a pattern of escalating academic and social failures. This method of “choice making” provided substantial benefits for students with ED within the instructional domain as well as behaviorally (Dunlap et al., 1993). To be successful, positive behavioral supports must be arranged so that all personnel take equal responsibility for the planning, implementation, and evaluation of student progress. Regardless of the consistency and implementation of school-wide support plans, many students with ED will continue to exhibit challenging behaviors and experience academic and social failure. These students will require more intensive and individualized interventions by teachers with proficient skills and knowledge (Sugai, et al., 1999).

Rutherford and Quinn (1998) discussed the limited use of positive behavior supports within separate day programs as a primary concern primarily due to minimal teaching training and inconsistent use. Quinn, Rutherford, and Osher (1999) referred to six essential components of effective programs for students with ED, and indicated that these elements were frequently absent in special day programs. They included:

1. Procedures for conducting functional assessments of the skills and learning needs of the student;
2. A flexible curriculum that teaches functional academic, social, and daily living skills;
3. Effective and efficient instructional techniques;
4. Transitional programs and procedures that tie the special school to the public schools and to the community;
5. Comprehensive systems for providing both internal services and external community services to students;
6. Availability of appropriate staff and resources for students with disabilities. (p. 23)

These components were closely associated with recommendations from *The National Agenda for Achieving Better Results for Children and Youth with Serious Emotional Disturbance* (U.S. Department of Education, 1994). This report was based on a national study that included interviews, literature reviews, focus groups, stakeholder meetings, a national teleconference, and written responses in order to promote changes in the way students with ED were being educated. *The National Agenda* utilized research, policy, and practice to guide the study. A mission statement was defined as “Achieving Better Results for Individuals with Disabilities,” and goals were identified to accomplish the mission. They included:

- 1) To provide and maintain an adequate number of personnel;
- 2) To develop the capacity to ready systems to meet the needs of changing populations;

- 3) To secure and expand access and inclusion for children with disabilities; and
- 4) To identify measures and improve outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

The *National Agenda* contributed to the existing knowledge base of interventions that are likely to improve outcomes for students with ED. Seven interdependent strategic targets became a model for enhancing the capacity of schools to foster the emotional development and adjustment of all students with ED. There was correspondence with the strategic targets from *The National Agenda* and the components identified in Danielson's (1996) framework.

“Expanding positive learning opportunities and results” (U.S. Department of Education, 1994, p. 8) was the first strategic target that documented the poor academic and behavioral success rates of students with ED. This strategy stressed the importance of appropriate curricula, instruction, and extra-curricular activities and included a strong parental component. Consideration was given to challenging curriculum, effective instruction, and healthy learning experiences to enhance academic, career and technical, and social skills for students with ED and for those at risk for developing significant behavioral disorders.

“Strengthening school and community capacity” (U.S. Department of Education, 1994, p. 9) was the second strategy that linked closely with the least restrictive provision. Since students with ED have been more likely to require a placement outside of the community school than students with other disabilities, ideas for integrating students from day schools and residential facilities back into the community were addressed. This strategy also targeted activities that pertained to the

need for prevention and early screening of students with ED, professional development of teachers, and adoption of creative approaches to keeping students in class.

The third strategic direction in the National Agenda was “value and address diversity” (U.S. Department of Education, 1994, p. 10). Incomplete understanding of racial, cultural, gender, and socioeconomic dimension can lead to the misidentification and inappropriate treatment of children. To value diversity is to acknowledge, understand, and appreciate the characteristics of different cultures and different groups of people. To address diversity is to develop the ability to work successfully with people of diverse backgrounds when designing and implementing services for children with serious emotional disturbance. This strategy recognized the need for teachers to respond to diversity among cultures, and to identify the differences and similarities among them. This approach also addressed the impact of language as the primary communication approach and the need to recognize it as a vital component of student and family support systems.

“Collaboration with families” (U.S. Department of Education, 1994, p. 11) was the focus of the fourth strategic target in the National Agenda. Locating and providing training for family members to advocate effectively for their children with ED and securing other mental health services was identified. Strategies focused on understanding differences among social interactions, communication at an understandable intensity, providing valuable information to parents regarding respite care and day care, and the coordination of other community services such as support groups and crisis intervention teams.

“Promoting appropriate assessment, supporting early screening and identification of children with ED through a multidisciplinary team approach and with parental involvement to address problem areas prior to a cycle of failure is key” (U.S. Department of Education, 1994, p. 12). The literature identified the need for culturally and linguistically appropriate assessments that would offer productive instructional strategies and sufficient information for future program planning. Methods for providing students with positive behavioral support in their school and home environments were encouraged to reduce challenging behaviors and replace with positive, more appropriate behaviors.

The sixth strategic strategy was most closely linked to Danielson’s (1996) fourth domain, professional responsibilities. “Providing ongoing skill development and support was identified to foster the enhancement of knowledge, understanding, and sensitivity among all professionals who work with children and youth with and at risk of developing ED” (U.S. Department of Education, 1994, p. 13). Support and training for the professionals working with students with ED was the focus of this strategy while stressing the need for comprehensive services. Teachers reported feelings of isolation and misunderstandings by their colleagues due to the differences and diverse issues in teaching students with ED. The strategy identified the need for ongoing support and training to teachers to strengthen instructional skills and develop a comprehensive understanding of the needs of students with ED. It also identified the need for families, teachers, service providers, and other stakeholders to collaborate and participate together in training opportunities that focus on the development of new skills and the acquisition of promising intervention techniques and practices for students with ED.

“Creating comprehensive and collaborative systems was the final strategic target that supported initiatives to help generate comprehensive and seamless systems of appropriate, culturally competent, mutually reinforcing services” (U.S. Department of Education, 1994, p. 14). The focus was not limited to the linkages of schools and families to other community agencies, but included the development of innovative systems of support that identified responsibility, coordinated programs, and sustained community contacts. The purpose of a comprehensive systematic approach was to concurrently pull private and public funding sources together in an effort to bring services to the child in the natural environment.

Additional support and services are offered to students placed in special day schools through The Comprehensive Services Act for At-risk Youth and Families (CSA). This act passed by the Virginia General Assembly in 1992, modified the administrative and funding structure that provided services to at-risk youth and their families. Through a collaborative agreement among the following agencies: Department of Social Services, Department of Juvenile Justice, Department of Education, and Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation, and Substance Abuse Services, funds were pooled to purchase and provide quality supports and services to children and youth with ED in the least restrictive setting (Virginia Department of Education, 2002).

Special day school programs continue to be designed and implemented to meet the needs of children and youth with ED, mental health conditions, and other “at-risk” behaviors (Quinn et al., 1999). A review of instructional practices and professional responsibilities related to educating students with ED in private day schools is necessary.

Research Studies Addressing Professional Practices

This segment of the chapter examines studies that address the instructional approaches and professional practices of teachers in ED settings. An analysis of four studies is organized within Danielson's (1996) framework and four key domains: (a) planning and preparation; (b) classroom environment; (c) instruction; and (d) professional practices. This analysis is intended to illustrate various instructional approaches and learning environments that support the academic and social growth of students with ED. With emphasis on the fourth domain, this portion of the chapter will conclude with additional professional commentary and a synthesis of the literature pertaining to professional responsibilities.

Planning and Preparation

Planning and preparation, Danielson's (1996) first domain and corresponding components and elements are depicted in Figure 2. This domain addressed the teacher's role in understanding, planning, and sequencing the content and activities as well as comprising knowledge of students' approaches to learning. The importance of utilizing multiple and alternative types of assessments of student progress was emphasized.

Making instructional changes necessary to respond to students' behaviors was key in this domain. A study was conducted to examine the assessment-based curricular modifications derived from positive behavioral support models for children who met the federal definition for ED (Kern, Delaney, Clarke, Dunlap, and Childs, 2001). Prior to the study a functional behavioral assessment (FBA) was completed through direct observation of antecedent stimuli and responses immediately following identified challenging behaviors. Interviews with each participant, teachers, and other staff

Domain 1 Planning and Preparation

1a. Knowledge of Content and Pedagogy

- Knowledge of content
- Knowledge of prerequisite relationships
- Knowledge of content-related pedagogy

1b. Knowledge of Students

- Knowledge of characteristics of age group
- Knowledge of students' varied approaches to learning
- Knowledge of students' skills and knowledge
- Knowledge of students' interests and cultural heritage

1c. Selecting Instructional Goals

- Value
- Clarity
- Suitability for diverse students
- Balance

1d. Knowledge of Resources

- Resources for teaching
- Resources for students

1e. Designing Coherent Instruction

- Learning activities
- Instructional materials and resources
- Instructional groups
- Lesson and unit service

1f. Assessing Student Learning

- Congruence with instructional goals
- Criteria and standards
- Use for planning

Figure 2. Planning and Preparation Domain, Components, and Elements, (Danielson, 1996).

members were conducted to identify activities associated with challenging behaviors. The FBA provided information pertaining to relationships between students' behaviors and identified curricular variables. Subsequently, adaptations to the curriculum were related to low rates of problematic behaviors. Students' preferences and interests in content and instructional practices were also identified through the FBA process.

The setting of the investigation was within an ED classroom during routine instructional time. Two 11-year-old boys in fifth grade were participants in this study. Student A was described as also having attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder in addition to ED and cognitive functioning within the high average range. He was described as exhibiting disruptive behaviors, poor attention to tasks, and difficulty maintaining adequate peer relations. The specific behaviors associated with these descriptions were not defined. Student B also met the federal definition for ED, maintained average cognitive functioning, exhibited repeated noncompliance of teacher directions, and also displayed poor peer relations and task engagement.

Task engagement was identified and scored as the dependent variable and described as student engagement in the activity consistent with the teacher's directions. This was more precisely defined as "eyes on materials during written or manipulative assignments, or on the teacher during lecture or verbal instruction" (Kern et al, 2001, p. 240). "Disruptive behavior included any occurrence of non-vocal noise making, talking out when not related to the assigned task, vocalizing profanity or negative content, leaving the work area without permission, or failing to comply within five seconds following an instruction" (p. 240).

A 15 second continuous interval method for task engagement and disruptive behaviors was employed between two experienced behavioral consultants who had provided behavioral consultation and data collection in the classrooms for the previous two years. Task engagement was scored if Students A and B were engaged as defined during a minimum of 70% of the intervals. Prior to conducting the study inter-observer agreement was achieved at a minimum of 80% for each dependent variable for 40% of the sessions for Student A and 36% of the session for Student B. “Inter-observer agreement for Student A averaged 90% for task engagement and 81% for frequency of disruptive behavior. Inter-observer agreement for Student B averaged 92% for task engagement and 98% for frequency of disruptive behavior” (p. 240).

Following the FBA it was hypothesized that for both students problematic behavior occurred in an effort to avoid tasks that involved writing. “Task engagement would increase and disruptive behavior would decrease if the students were presented with a preferred medium to complete their work. Additionally behavior would improve if student areas of interest were incorporated into the task” (p. 242).

An ABAB design was used to test the hypothesis. Overall results revealed a mean percentage engagement during the traditional assignment condition of 69%, while the mean percentage engagement for interesting assignment conditions was 94%. The interesting assignment condition resulted in lower levels of disruptive behavior. The mean number of disruptive behaviors for the traditional assignment condition was 1.4 per minute whereas the mean number of disruptive behaviors for the interesting assignment condition was .28 per minute.

The utilization of an FBA during the planning and preparation phase of instruction in this study was important in the education of students with ED. During this stage problematic behaviors and simplistic curricular modifications were identified in an attempt to improve student behavior. No additional resources were necessary during the implementation of the curricular modifications. The initiation of accommodations had the most significant effects on task engagement for both students. Additionally when a content variable was introduced to include a high interest content behavior improved. (Kern et al., 2001).

Although the study maintained the use of uncomplicated interventions without the need for additional resources, a potential limitation of the study pertained to the expected use of behavioral support plans as noted in the interventions. For many students with ED in special day schools, the implementation of curricular interventions by teachers may require more versatile methods for extended periods of time in addition to those described in the study. Additionally it is important to plan for the reintroduction of traditional approaches to learning as students with ED transition from separate settings into more inclusive environments where the delivery of instruction may include less student choice.

Classroom Environment

The classroom environment as described in Danielson's (1996) second domain included elements associated with all non-instructional and interpersonal interactions necessary for effective instruction. An established culture for learning in a supportive atmosphere of high expectations, commitment to students where mutual respect is observed is characterized in this domain. Classroom rules, routines, and procedures are

in place, and monitoring of student behavior is obvious. Components and elements in this domain are indicated in Figure 3.

The environment of a specialized school was an essential element in a study by Cox (1999). Eighty-three students were randomly selected who were identified as socially maladjusted but not specifically eligible for special education. All students in the study were considered at risk based on one of the following prescribed criteria: (a) having police involvement for criminal behavior; (b) actions that resulted in suspensions from school, excluding fighting; and (c) a high rate of absenteeism. The research was conducted using a 2 x 3 repeated measures design. A participation and control group were involved prior to entering the program, at the end of the program, and one year following completion of the program. Data were collected through 61 close-ended interview questions to determine a connection between attitudes toward school, self-esteem, and delinquent behavior. Local university graduate students conducted the interviews. Official school records served as the second source of data collection, and included grades, standardized test scores, and attendance records.

To measure attitudes toward school, students responded to an 11 item scale that pertained to their perceptions about teacher support, academic success, stigma, and overall expectations. The reliability value was .76 for the pre, post, and one-year follow-up. Self-esteem was measured using a 6 item scale where high scale scores indicated positive self-esteem, and low scores represented low self-esteem.

Domain 2 The Classroom Environment

2a. Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport

- Teacher interactions with students
- Student interactions

2b. Establishing a culture for learning

- Importance of the content
- Student pride in work
- Expectations for learning and achievement

2c. Managing Classroom Procedures

- Management of instructional groups
- Management of transitions
- Management of materials and supplies
- Performance of non-instructional duties

2d. Managing Student Behavior

- Expectations
- Monitoring of student behavior
- Response to student behavior

2e. Organizing physical space

- Safety and arrangement of furniture
- Accessibility to learning and use of physical resources

Figure 3. The Classroom Environment Domain, Components, and Elements, (Danielson, 1996).

The study revealed that while attending the special day program student performance improved. Upon return to the regular school, the students became frustrated and were unable to cope effectively. This was likely due to the structure of the setting and the students' inability to adjust from an environment with less rigidity than a typical school. The typical environment of the special school was smaller, more relaxed, compassionate, and responsive than traditional schools. The ability of the teachers to spend more time with students raised self-esteem as indicated in the study. When students returned to their middle school, there was less individual support, and academic performance was not rated as high.

There was strong evidence in the study to suggest that students experienced success in a more individualized supportive environment. Although the study revealed an increase in student attendance, grades, and self-esteem, these effects did not appear to influence students' attitudes toward school.

Instruction

“Curriculum and instruction that fully engages students is the most effective. The success of many specialized programs is a result of the correlation between the needs of the students and how the curriculum is presented” (Quinn, 1999, p. 22). Danielson's (1996) third domain and corresponding components and elements are described as the “heart of teaching- the actual engagement of students in content and represents the primary mission of schools: to enhance student learning (p. 31). Components and elements in this domain are depicted in Figure 4. A connection between Danielson's instructional domain and studies related to the provision of instruction to students with ED in public school programs was apparent in the literature.

Domain 3 Instruction

3a. Communicating clearly and accurately

- Directions and procedures
- Oral and written language

3b. Using questioning and discussion techniques

- Quality of questions
- Discussion techniques
- Student participation

3c. Engaging students in learning

- Representation of content
- Activities and assignments
- Grouping of students
- Instruction materials and resources
- Structure and pacing

3d. Providing feedback to students

- Quality: accurate, substantive, constructive, and specific time lines

3e. Demonstrating flexibility and responsiveness

- Lesson adjustment
- Response to students
- Persistence

Figure 4. Instruction Domain, Components, and Elements, (Danielson, 1996).

Dunlap et al. (1993) noted the importance of identifying the effects of content areas and mode of instruction on problematic behavior. Curricular accommodations such as shortened task periods, functional activities, and student choice and their relationship on student behavior have been studied (Gunter & Denny, 1998). Students' resistance to perform academically was apparent throughout the study. Quinn et al. (1999) addressed curricular influences on problematic behavior via the use of functional behavioral assessment. Kern et al. (2001) discussed the level of difficulty of assigned academic tasks in relationship to disruptive and off-task behaviors of students with ED. Sekayi (2001) identified the resistance of students to perform because curriculum was not challenging and the academic expectations were lower in special day programs than in traditional schools.

DePaepe, Shores, and Jack (1996) concluded academic materials served as aversive stimuli and an increase in escape and/or avoidance responses occurred in a study of two students with ED. Prior to the study the mathematics performance of each student was evaluated using a curriculum based assessment tool that identified skill deficits and academic objectives. Two sets of math problems were selected from the assessment. An easy set included those problems that each student completed with 90% accuracy and a difficult set that was completed with 75% or less accuracy.

The first student in the study, Student A, was 12 years old and his recognized inappropriate behaviors included talking out, getting out of seat without permission, and inappropriate verbalizations toward others. Study sessions for Student A were held in his ED classroom. Student B was 9 years old and engaged in similar behaviors with

additional actions that included climbing on furniture and aggression toward peers and objects. Experimental sessions for Student B were held outside of the ED classroom in a small resource room.

The percentage of time spent engaged in disruptive behavior was the first dependent variable. An operational definition of disruptive behavior, that included inappropriate verbal and physical behaviors and physical aggression, was defined as “behavior that interrupted the ongoing educational activities of completion of assigned tasks, or that was potentially harmful to the student, peers, teacher, or objects” (Depaepe et al., 1996, p. 218). The second dependent variable was the percentage of time the student was on task. On task behavior was defined as “looking at or being actively engaged in the assigned academic task” (p. 218). Examples of observable behaviors that represented those in the definition were described for reference.

An ABAB design was used to determine the effects of task difficulty on disruptive and on-task behavior with the easy set of math problems being presented during condition A and difficult math problems presented during condition B. During each presentation session of the math set, the students were reinforced with verbal praise on a variable interval schedule every 3 minutes of being on task or remaining seated if not engaged in the material. Tangible items were also offered to each student at the conclusion of each session as another means for reinforcement. Inter-observer agreement was reached on the frequency of behaviors at 95%, duration agreement at 93%, occurrence agreement for on-task behavior at 93%, and digits on math problems correct at 100% (Depaepe et al., 1996).

The results of the study indicated overall on-task behavior of both students was higher and fewer disruptive behaviors documented when they were presented with easy math problems. When presented with more difficult problems, time on-task decreased and disruptive behavior increased. During the initial session of easy math items, Student A engaged in disruptive behaviors an average of 7% of the time, was on-task an average of 86% of the time, had an average rate per minute of 9.4 digits correct, and an average rate of .3 errors per minute on the problems. When presented with difficult math items Student A engaged in disruptive behaviors an average of 16% of the time, was on-task an average of 38% of the time, had an average rate per minute of 4.3 digits correct, and an average rate of .5 errors per minute on the problems. Re-establishing the easy conditions did not evoke the same high level found in the first session of the study, however, data found in the final difficult conditions phase approached the initial difficult condition data.

Student B displayed similar patterns of behavior and engaged in disruptive behaviors an average of 18% of the time, was on-task an average of 69% of the time, had an average rate per minute of 7.6 digits correct, and an average rate of .23 errors per minute on the problems. When presented with difficult math items Student B engaged in disruptive behaviors an average of 57% of the time, was on-task an average of 24% of the time, had an average rate per minute of 1.1 digits correct, and an average rate of .45 errors per minute on the problems. With the exception of one session, Student B returned to a comparable high rate of time on-task and a comparable low rate of disruptive behavior when easy conditions reoccurred (Depaepe et al.,1996).

With both students the data show some projection across sessions. Factors other than the ease or difficulty of tasks may be attributed to nature of responses observed.

Although the behaviors of each student were described as being similar, both identified with ED, the cognitive ability of each student was not described and may have attributed to the frequency, duration, or types of responses indicated within the sessions. Additionally, it was not known whether the type of academic activity was reinforcing to the students, or if it served as an aversive stimulus. In any case, the use of instructional materials as well as the delivery of such material should match the student's instructional level of performance (Gunter & Denny, 1998).

Professional Responsibilities

Danielson's (1996) fourth domain addressed professional practices of teachers. The roles and responsibilities of professional educators outside of the classroom in addition to those with students are assumed in this domain. A wide-range of responsibilities including self-reflection and professional growth to contributions to the school and community are described in Figure 5. Studies specific to professional practices of teachers in special day schools were absent from the literature, however professional development in special education was the focus of a study of 341 special education teachers who served students with a variety of disabilities. Sands, Adams, and Stout (1995) determined "teacher training in curriculum development occurred mostly on the job, teachers believed the IEP constitutes the curriculum for students with disabilities, and teacher judgment primarily guided the content of classroom instruction" (p. 68).

Domain 4 Professional Responsibilities

4a. Reflecting on teaching

- Accuracy
- Use in future teaching

4b. Maintaining accurate records

- Student completion of assignments
- Student progress in learning
- Non-instructional records

4c. Communicating with families

- Information about the instructional program
- Information about individual students
- Engagement of families in the instructional program

4d. Contributing to the school and district

- Relationships with colleagues
- Service to the school
- Participation in school and district projects

4e. Growing and developing professionally

- Enhancement of content knowledge and pedagogical skill
- Service to the profession

4f. Showing professionalism

- Service to students
- Advocacy
- Decision-making

Figure 5. Professional Responsibilities Domain, Components, and Elements, (Danielson, 1996).

A questionnaire addressing demographics, special education curriculum, adaptations to the curriculum, and future training needs was distributed to 592 special education teachers at the elementary, middle, and high school levels in nine Colorado school districts. There was representation from rural, urban, and suburban districts. A 58% return rate was obtained with 341 surveys completed, and the highest response rates from the suburban districts at 77%. Of those who completed the survey 83% were female, 14% male, and 3% did not indicate their gender. Fifty three percent of the teachers surveyed taught at the elementary level, 34% at the middle and junior high and 17% taught at the high school level. Fifty-four percent of the teachers had 10 or more years of experience teaching students with disabilities, with 22% having taught 6 to 10 years, and 20% had 1 to 5 years of special education teaching experience. Seventy-five percent of the teachers surveyed worked with students with ED in a variety of service delivery models with 36% of time spent in a resource models, and 25% in self-contained classrooms (Sands, et al., 1995).

Training and curriculum development was a subsection within the survey instrument that solicited responses regarding the amount of training teachers received in curriculum development, adaptation, and modification. Seventy-two percent of the teachers indicated that experience on the job was the source of their training in these areas. Forty-one percent of the teachers surveyed indicated that they had taken more than one special education curriculum development course, attendance at district-wide training for special educators was indicated by 37% of the teachers, while 35% indicated

attending training related to curriculum for general educators. Conferences and general education curriculum courses were cited the least with 21% and 27% respectively. Overall, curriculum development opportunities were primarily acquired through complete courses or training offered to general educators, while training in adaptation and modification was most frequently received through conferences, in-service programs specifically for special educators at the district level (Sands et al., 1995).

Summary of Commentary

The literature identifies a population of students with disabilities who exhibit significant behavioral, social, and emotional concerns. Students with ED are held to the same academic standards as students in traditional schools and classrooms. The special educators teaching students with ED are expected to demonstrate through their instructional practices, positive academic student outcomes while addressing diverse behavioral needs of students. Selected research studies address essential components of effective programming for students with ED. The studies linked with Danielson's (1996) framework for teaching and supported effective practices in planning and preparation, classroom environment, and delivery of instruction for students with ED. A gap in the literature and a lack of research studies was apparent when identifying the professional responsibilities of teachers, Danielson's fourth domain, as it applies to educators in special day schools. There was noticeable alignment in the literature regarding professional responsibilities as described by Danielson (1996) and by Marzano (2003). The terms collegiality and professionalism were used to express the manner in which staff members in schools interact and the extent to which they approach their work as professionals.

In this era of school reform and accountability, it is essential to examine the professional practices of special educators working in private day school settings and to explore how administrators support the professional practices of the faculty.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides an overview of the methodology used in exploring the professional responsibilities of special educators in special day schools for secondary students with ED. Rationale for a qualitative design, the researcher's role, and procedures for constructing the study are addressed. Data collection and management procedures are also explained.

Overview of Methodology

With a focus on accountability in contemporary schools, educational leaders and teachers are being held to higher standards. Students with disabilities are expected to access the general curriculum and are included in the high stakes assessments as are non-disabled students (Gagnon & McLaughlin, 2004). The instructional programs provided in private special day schools for students with ED are held to the same standards as those in general and special programs within public schools. It is necessary that educators continually enhance their professional skills to address the improvement of student outcomes.

Danielson (1996) described a framework for professional practice that represents aspects of teachers' responsibilities in promoting improved student learning. The fourth domain in the framework emphasizes the professional responsibilities of educators that are essential to cultivating student learning and improving student outcomes. In the present study, this domain served as a guide in the development of my research questions.

The development of research questions is often considered the most important step in conducting any type of research study (Yin, 2003). The focus of this inquiry is to enhance professional practices by examining the professional responsibilities and opportunities for professional growth for teachers in special day schools who serve students with ED. The questions guiding the study were: (a) How do special educators in special day schools describe their professional responsibilities, (b) how do they describe their professional needs, and (c) how are their professional needs supported? The first question guiding the study related to professional responsibilities as identified by Danielson (1996). Questions two and three reflected Danielson's notions of growing and developing professionally and the need for administrative support .

Rationale for a Qualitative Design

A qualitative research design was utilized to examine how special educators in private day schools serving secondary students with ED characterized their professional responsibilities and need for professional growth. Gathering data from focus groups of teachers, reviewing field notes, and examining documents from each school provided a broad-involvement design with three qualitative data sources. This design allowed for the discovery of views and perceptions of the participants related to instructional and professional practices. The interactions and sharing of information among the focus group participants in conjunction with researcher's field notes, and review of documents was vital in the exploration and discovery of descriptive data for the study.

Focus groups were the primary source of data collection for the study. Listening and gathering information in an effort to understand how individuals feel or think about an issue was pertinent to the topic being studied (Morgan, 1997). This method of

gathering information allowed the participants to self-disclose experiences, attitudes, and beliefs in a relaxed, nonjudgmental environment. The discussion was facilitated through a moderator who encouraged everyone to share while keeping the conversation focused as suggested by Krueger & Casey (2000). Focus groups provided the researcher with observable interactions within the group based on the questions being facilitated. “Good interviews are those in which the subjects are at ease and talk freely about their points of view” (Bodgan & Biklen, 1992, p. 97). Additionally, focus group research relies on “group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found within the group. Individual members are more likely to reveal further information to those who more closely resemble themselves than to those who are different from them” (Morgan, 1997, p.2). “Group discussions provide direct evidence about similarities and differences in the participants’ opinions and experiences” (p. 10).

To strengthen the research project and as a secondary source of data, documents yielding information that address the professional practices of teachers within the day schools were collected from the focus group members and the administrators overseeing the school facility. Documents offer indicators and insights that can provide additional learning about the topic (Merriam, 2001). Relevant documents collected from the staff included performance evaluations, communication logs, progress sheets, attendance reports, report cards, handbooks, and vision statements. (See Appendix I for a matrix of documents reviewed.) Documents were located at the school site and generated through discussion and interview questions.

Researcher's Role

The role of the researcher is critical in qualitative research. "The investigator is the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing" (Merriam, 2001, p. 20). As the researcher, I interacted with subjects through the interview process, collected and continually analyzed the data through the interviews, reviewed field notes, and documents. As a Special Education Director my experience, knowledge, and leadership skills are utilized in my daily work with teachers, administrators, specialists, parents, and community members. I am sensitive to the circumstances, agenda, and relationships that exist in this research setting. My training as a teacher of ED students, an educational diagnostician, and a special education administrator reinforced my ability to be flexible when unexpected events and change occurred, a quality that assisted in the process of gathering qualitative data. I have engaged in focus group interviewing within the past two years as a participant, and was highly observant of the manner in which the sessions were conducted.

Having a connection to the topic created a deeper understanding of many aspects of the study. These connections and experiences also created an awareness of bias. Recognizing subjectivity within the data served as a means for addressing prejudices and other biases (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). I paid particular attention to my beliefs and opinions. First, I summarized key points that had been shared and asked participants if they concurred with the summary. As the data were continually analyzed and categories and themes emerged, I reread interview transcripts and compared and confirmed findings and conclusions. I used field notes that included commentary and acknowledged and reflected on interpretation based on personal opinion. The notes

provided “comments on and thoughts about the setting, people, and activities while raising questions about the researcher’s feelings, reactions, initial interpretations, and working hypotheses” (Merriam, 2001, p. 106).

Morgan (1997) suggested the use of an assistant moderator to decrease the opportunity for bias within a study. The assistant moderator used during the interview process was a doctoral student and experienced special education teacher. She utilized the strategies and assumed the responsibilities as suggested by Morgan (1997) and her role was discussed and delineated prior to the start of the interviews. The assistant moderator was used to assist in note taking and topic summarization. The assistant moderator observed individual and group dynamics, managed audio recording, prepared written notes, summarized main points on large poster paper during each interview, and also addressed unexpected environmental conditions that arose. Debriefing with the assistant moderator at the conclusion of focus group discussions was also productive in gaining a clear and accurate representation of information shared among the participants.

Procedures for Constructing the Study

This portion of the chapter provides an overview of the procedures for constructing the study. Issues surrounding entry and access, selection of the settings and participants are described. Confidentiality issues are also addressed.

Issues of Entry and Access

Prior to conducting research a proposal was submitted to the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University Institutional Review Board. An informed consent document included a description of the project, procedures for conducting the study, a description of the methodology, and risks and benefits associated with the study

(See Appendix A). Permission from each focus group participant to conduct research is on file with the researcher. A letter of approval by the Institutional Review Board of Virginia Tech was secured and is also on file with the researcher (See Appendix B).

The point of entry was the administrator or principal for each special day school. Communication was established with the principal through the initial phone contact during the site selection process. Each administrator was very amiable and interested in including their teachers for participation in the study and responded promptly to all communications. A letter summarizing the proposed research study and a copy of the invitation to participate forms were mailed to the administrator of each school (See Appendices C and D). Telephone communication and electronic mail to school administrators provided clarification of the research process.

Selecting the Settings

“Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 2001, p. 61). The first phase of sampling included establishing criteria for selecting private day schools for students with emotional disabilities. The first criteria was geographic range to include three privately operated special day schools were in the northern, central, and southwestern regions of Virginia that served secondary school students with ED. Other criteria for sample selection included private day schools that: (a) have been in operation for more than 3 years; (b) have more than 50 students identified as ED through a formal eligibility process as designated in the IDEA; (c) employ at least 5 special education teachers who are fully or

provisionally licensed by the State; and (d) maintain a separate administrative unit.

These established criteria permitted comparability of school characteristics.

The State's *Private Special Education Day Schools Handbook* (2003) was used as a gateway to the case selection process utilizing the established criteria. Similarities and differences were evident due to the nature of privately operated programs and the populations served, therefore mutual purposes, functions, and administrative operations associated with the schools were considered in the selection process. Following an initial review of potential sites, I conducted informal phone interviews with the administrators of the sites to discuss selection criteria and willingness to participate.

Morgan (1997) stated, "three to five focus groups generally will provide meaningful insights providing there is variability both within and across the groups" (p.43). The study included three focus groups of special educators from the selected private schools that served secondary students with ED. For the protection of the selected private school facility, each site was assigned a pseudonym.

"Private school A" is located in a metropolitan area and suburban community with a maximum capacity of 195 students and an average of 9 students per classroom. Students were placed from public school divisions and other agencies and therefore not considered a local community school for the majority of students. Students attending the private day school had ED, with or without other identified disabilities such as specific learning disabilities, attention deficit disorder, and language delays. Classrooms were staffed with two teachers, one licensed as a special educator and one with a general education license in various content areas. An assistant who was not a licensed teacher was also assigned to each classroom for additional behavioral support. The classrooms

were staffed in this manner in an effort to merge a content area teacher and a special education teacher, with the special educator assuming the primary responsibilities for instruction. Related services available at Private School A included speech language therapy, physical therapy, occupational therapy, art therapy, music therapy, counseling and psychological services, and transition services as indicated in the IEP of each student. The mission of Private School A is to help each student reach his/her educational and emotional potential, to recognize individual learning styles, and to discover how to utilize the skills and talents of each student.

“Private School B” is located in a suburban area and serves students from local public school divisions that included small city, and rural areas with a maximum capacity of 70 students and an average of 10 students per classroom. Students were placed in Private School B from local school divisions that were in close proximity to the school. Students attending the private day school had emotional disabilities, with or without other identified disabilities such as specific learning disabilities and attention deficit disorder. Classrooms were staffed with one licensed special education teacher, and two counselors who hold undergraduate or graduate degrees in the human services field. Counseling as a related service is available through licensed therapists on staff at the school. Speech language therapy and transition services are also available as needed. The mission of Private School B is to provide a program that meets each student’s academic, behavioral, interpersonal, and social skill needs. There is also emphasis on preparing students for transition into a less restrictive educational environment.

“Private School C” is located in a suburban area and serves students from a local public school division located in a small city and other school divisions situated in

suburban areas. There is a maximum capacity of 50 students and an average of 10 students per classroom. Students were placed in Private School C from local school divisions and social service agencies that were in close proximity to the school. Additionally, there were students without disabilities placed by their parents as a result of suspensions or expulsions from public schools. Classrooms were staffed with one licensed special education teacher, and one assistant who was not a licensed teacher and assisted multiple classrooms. Related services available at Private School C included counseling services. The mission of Private School C is to provide a nurturing, non-traditional learning environment that values each student as an individual helping all students to realize their fullest potential. Private School C promotes a student-centered curriculum that focuses on student strengths, interests, and contributions to society. The school culture also promotes group decision-making among the students and faculty and relies on the group members to contribute to all aspects of their academic and behavioral program.

Although this research is not focused on specific cases, it is important to note the characteristics of the sample to assess the transferability of the findings to other particular schools and districts. The three day schools are located in different parts of the State but share characteristics such as suburban, various disabilities served, services offered, costs associated with placements, and mission statements. The individual school enrollments vary from 50 to 195 students. Readers are encouraged to keep these shared characteristics and variances in mind as they read findings of the study.

Selecting the Participants

The second phase of sampling involved the selection of teacher focus group participants to communicate the knowledge essential to conducting the study.

“Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that one wants to discover, understand, gain insight; therefore one needs to select a sample from which one can learn the most” (Merriam, 2001, p. 48). I discussed the selection of the school staff to participate in the study with each school site administrator. I advised each administrator to select teachers who would likely be willing to participate in the study and who were likely to offer the most information about the topic. I also asked the administrators to select participants that as a group were diverse in their beliefs and opinions and also shared commonalities regarding the education of students with ED within a specialized setting. Morgan (1997) affirmed that participants should share common characteristics and show evidence of differences in their opinions.

Following the discussion regarding selection of participants, a follow-up letter summarizing the purpose of the study, and criteria to use when selecting teachers for the study was sent to school administrators (See Appendix C). A second letter was mailed to administrators to disseminate to their teachers inviting them to participate in the study (See Appendix D). Krueger and Casey (2001) stated the importance of providing notice or reminders to participants in a study as well as focusing on the value of the group process. A third letter was mailed to participants in the study to confirm their participation and remind them of the date, time, and location of the focus group discussion (See Appendix E). Finally, phone calls and email messages were provided to administrators one day prior to the focus group interviews as a reminder of the

scheduled interviews and to answer any final questions prior to conducting the interviews.

Assurance of Confidentiality

All focus group participants and school administrators were assured confidentiality and written permission for their participation was obtained from all participants prior to initiating the study. Teacher participants were asked to complete a questionnaire to obtain demographic information for the study (See Appendix G). “The moderator should be clear and open about the nature of assurances” (Krueger & Casey, 2001, p. 175). My intent as a researcher was to provide an understandable explanation to each participant regarding expectation, purpose of the study, procedures utilized in conducting the study, use of the data collection, and how results benefit participants or the school. Participants were assured no names would be revealed and a pseudonym was assigned to each individual and school focus group that was referenced in the written description.

Data Collection Procedures

This portion of the chapter pertains to the procedures used to conduct the research study. Data in the form of focus groups interviews, field notes, and documents were collected from 3 private day schools selected for the study. Data collection was ongoing until the point of saturation as suggested by Yin (2003).

Means of Collecting Data

Data were collected at each site through focus groups interviews, field notes, and review of documents. The complexity and size of the private schools, the scheduling of groups, the need to provide follow-up interviews, and review of all documents including

those identified during focus group meetings, determined the amount of time spent in each school. A review of the literature and Danielson's (1996) framework for enhancing professional practices served as a guide from which the interview protocol was based (See Appendix E for focus group protocol).

Focus Group Interviews

Merriam (2001) suggested working from a list of prepared questions as a means of “translating the research objectives into specific and measurable language, and as a way of motivating respondents to share their knowledge of the phenomenon under study” (p. 78). The interview protocol was designed to elicit responses based on the participants' experiences, opinions, feelings, knowledge, and background. Semi-structured interviews with a high level of moderator involvement are intended to occur (Morgan, 1997). Yin (2003) maintained that a focused, open-ended interview includes carefully worded questions and assumes a conversational manner. This type of semi-structured discussion (a) ensures the same type of information is collected from each participant or group; (b) reduces the likelihood of bias; (c) facilitates data analysis; and (d) minimizes concerns about legitimacy and credibility (Patton, 2002).

Data collection consisted of 3 focus groups, one from each school site and included at least 4 participants in each group. “Focus Group A” was made up of 5 participants, “Focus Group B” consisted of 5 participants, and “Focus Group C” included 4 participants. All focus groups met the established criteria as relayed to building administrators prior to conducting the study.

Data were collected at each site at established times convenient for each group. All focus group interviews were scheduled in the afternoon during regular school hours.

Interviews with all focus groups were scheduled within a period of two months, with no rescheduling necessary. A follow-up visit to one school occurred to collect program documents that were not retrieved on the day of the interview.

As recommended by Krueger and Casey (2000), the focus group sessions began with a welcome, an introduction of the moderator and assistant moderator, delineation of roles, an explanation of the purpose of the study, the procedures for the discussion, and assurance of confidentiality. Background knowledge, experiences, and commitment to the topic were shared with participants. Each focus group was informed that participation from every individual was encouraged and those less likely to openly communicate their opinions would be encouraged by the moderator to do so. Likewise, those individuals who may dominate a topic of conversation would be redirected by the moderator and asked to resist dialoging in an effort to allow discussion among all participants. A reminder was given that participation was voluntary and that everyone had the right to select not to respond to any question. The setting was relaxed and informal, and facilitating conversation was able to occur easily while providing everyone with ample time and opportunity to contribute to the discussion.

A paper and pencil questionnaire was used during the opening segment of the discussion to obtain demographic data from participants in each focus group (See Appendix G). The demographic information sheets completed by participants were collected and kept organized by group after each interview. All participants were asked to sign Informed Consent Forms if they had not already done so (See Appendix A). All forms were collected and retained by the researcher.

A “questioning route” as described by Krueger and Casey (2000) was predetermined and included the following types of questions: opening, introductory, transition, key, and ending (See Appendix F). An interview protocol served as a guide for questioning, but was intentionally left open-ended to allow for emergence of topics. The same questions and similar probes were posed to each focus group that allowed for expansion and flexibility of responses. Each group interview lasted approximately 2 hours.

Patton (2002) suggested the use of audio tape recorders for accuracy of the data collected. Each focus group interview was audio taped, using two tape recorders, and transcribed verbatim by a experienced transcriber following each session. Participants acknowledged their consent to audio recording by providing their initials on the consent form. The assistant moderator was the primary note taker during the group discussion to supplement the recording and to assist in listening for key points and potential questions for further use. The assistant moderator also used large sheets of paper on the walls to record key points under each of the three primary questions posed to the group. A review of noted key points was reviewed and summarized with participants at the conclusion of the interview. This process allowed for clarification and modifications of key points as suggested by Morgan (1997).

Field Notes

Field notes were maintained in conjunction with the interviews to document opinions, insights, and comments that I had as the study progressed. These data were discussed with the assistant moderator and used for additional analysis. Debriefing sessions occurred with the assistant moderator at the conclusion of each interview

session to compare ideas documented in the field notes and through observation of individual and group behavior during the focus group discussions. The data collection process ceased once the point of saturation was reached.

Document Review

Merriam (2001) referred to “documents as the umbrella term for a wide range of written, visual, and physical material relevant to the study at hand” (p. 112). Pertinent documents yielding data to address the professional practices of teachers within the day schools were shared. Relevant documents included a broad range of materials located at the interview sites and were generated through discussion and interview questions. Blank copies of documents were collected and included teacher performance evaluations, communication and classroom logs, academic and behavioral student progress sheets, attendance reports, report cards, faculty, parent, and student handbooks, and vision statements. Documents surfaced for review as the data were collected through the focus group interviews. Merriam (2001) stressed the importance of the originality of the documents, and the context in which they were intended for use. The purpose and use of the documents was discussed with the participants and the authenticity of the documents was confirmed through the administrator of each school site. Documents from each private school were labeled, reviewed for function, frequency of use, and recorded into a matrix for analysis (See Appendix I).

Data Analysis and Management Procedures

“Data analysis consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating, and recombining the evidence” (Yin, 2003, p. 102). These procedures in qualitative research as recommended by Yin (2003) were utilized in the study. Data analysis followed the

constant comparative method as recommended by Maykut and Morehouse (1994). With the accumulation of a significant amount of information, data management techniques suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) were utilized. The following sections describe how the data were analyzed and managed. Issues surrounding the quality of the study are also included in this portion of the chapter.

Basic Operations in Data Analysis

An examination of the data occurred through a combination of inductive and deductive analysis. In the beginning stages, inductive analysis occurred by looking closely at concepts, patterns, categories, and themes within the data as suggested by Patton (2002). Complete transcripts of all focus group interviews were read, and then a line-by-line analysis of each transcript was conducted. Key concepts representing phenomena were drawn from the data and given a label based on what they were perceived to mean and what they looked like. I made notations of comments, questions, and observations about the data in the margins of the transcripts and field notes, and on the documents. Units of meaning that were determined to be conceptually similar, relevant, and important to the study were chunked into more abstract concepts, labeled as codes.

This coding process continued until all identified units of information (codes) were delineated into meaningful categories. Themes were documented from the data within these established categories. Themes were key concepts that were culled from the data and further illustrated the categories. Locating and determining categories and themes emerged after repeated readings of transcripts in their entirety and in segments, and by constantly sorting, reviewing, and organizing data as suggested by Merriam

(2001). Field notes were also analyzed in the same fashion to provide a practical representation of the data collected. Documents were coded by source and analyzed subsequent to transcripts and field notes.

Data Management

Anfara, Brown, and Mangione (2002) discussed the need to bring logic and organization to the data. Since the potential amount of data to be collected was large, each recorded and transcribed interview, set of field notes, and documents, was situated within the three primary questions so that structure and order could be maintained. Each transcript and set of field notes were filed electronically and then organized by using a modified version of the long-table approach as recommended by Krueger and Casey (2000). Large sheets of paper were posted on walls and organized by the 3 key questions for the study. Each transcript was copied on a different color paper, cut apart, and taped under the interview question to which it most closely related. The color paper distinguished the data source, and numbers had electronically been assigned to identify the interviewee type and page number. Coding occurred by sorting, re-sorting, and moving the taped concepts by similarities and differences into categories. When categories were refined, I used a color post-it note to identify the category code, and subsequent themes. The same method of management was used with field notes. Documents were organized and filed into colored folders that were associated with the designated school.

Summary notes were taken on large poster size notes by the assistant moderator throughout the interview sessions. They included key topics and points of discussion brought about by the participants. At the conclusion of each interview session, we

reviewed and reflected on our viewpoints regarding the essential topics addressed in the interviews and considered impressions that seemed significant during the interviews. Attention was paid to the relationships among the participants, the environment, the overt and covert behavior of the participants as a group as these aspects applied to the study. Other observations that appeared noteworthy and pertinent to the study were also discussed. The summary notes from the debriefing sessions with the assistant moderator served to verify the overall perception of the environment and were a valuable clarifying tool in the final determination of categories and themes.

Addressing Quality

Issues of quality in research can be addressed by providing sufficient and concise justifications for methods, findings, and conclusions, and by describing procedures that address the trustworthiness of a qualitative research study (Merriam, 2001). The concepts of credibility, transferability, and dependability are addressed in the following paragraphs. This portion of the chapter also describes the strategies I used throughout the inquiry to establish the trustworthiness of my findings.

Credibility. First, multiple sources of data collected from interviews, field notes, and review of documents allowed for the process of triangulation to occur as suggested by Merriam (2001). See Appendix H for the matrix used to show the comparison of data sources. Secondly, I had extended time in the field developing relationships with the participants at each site. My knowledge and expertise in the area of inquiry provided support to establishing credibility with participants. Thirdly, an assistant moderator was able to capture key points of interview comments and conversations. The assistant moderator took notes, summarized, paraphrased comments from the participants, and

honed in on key quotes that supported the data. Debriefing with the assistant moderator reduced the possibility of researcher bias and provided an additional perspective. A review of the summary notes at the conclusion of each interview session by participants served as a member check to further address the accuracy of the information and assurance of credibility.

Transferability. My impressions and details of the settings and focus groups were documented in field notes and analyzed with other collected data. This led to rich, detailed description and analysis of how special educators characterize their professional responsibilities and opportunities for professional growth. Readers can compare the context of the study and make determinations regarding the relevance to their own situation.

Dependability. Dependability refers to the results of the study being consistent with the data collected” (Merriam, 2001, p. 206). To assure dependability, procedures were used to collect, organize, and interpret the data. Coding and patterning strategies as suggested by Anfara et al. (2002) were used for interpretation of the data. The constant comparison method of data analysis was used for further analysis in the study as suggested by Maykut and Morehouse (1994) and Strauss and Corbin (1998).

Chapter Summary

The purpose of the study was to determine how teachers in special day schools characterize their professional responsibilities, opportunities for professional growth, and how administrators support them. A description of the qualitative method and the rationale for the approach was included in this chapter. The data analysis and management procedures and a description of the rigor and quality of the study were

presented. Chapter Four contains the findings of the study, including the recognition of predominant and underlying themes that emerge from the analysis of the interview content. Chapter Five is a summary of the study, and provides a discussion of the conclusions and implications for future research related to enhancing the professional practices of teachers in special day schools to improve student outcomes.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The research conducted in the study depicts the professional practices of special educators in private day schools for students with emotional disabilities (ED). Findings are presented in this chapter and describe how selected special education teachers in these schools viewed their professional responsibilities, professional needs, and how they regarded the support provided by their administrators.

The chapter begins with a demographic profile of the focus group participants and a brief description of each group participating in the study. The findings are then organized by the three key research questions, derived from Danielson's (1996) conceptual framework that guided the analysis. The findings are presented in the form of categories and themes with supporting quotations from the comments of participants. Information discussed between the moderator and assistant moderator is presented as interpretive commentary that illustrates the behaviors of identified focus group members or observations of their interactions in order to provide an in-depth understanding of the categories and themes. Data sources are referenced throughout the chapter by using three codes to identify the focus group associated with a particular quotation FG 1, FG 2, and FG 3. The private schools linked to each focus group are referred to as PS 1, PS 2, and PS 3.

Profile of Participants

Participants who were selected included special education teachers with at least one year of teaching students with ED in the selected private day school and who held a license to teach in the state. A total of 14 teachers from 3 three private special education

day schools took part in the study. The participants did not include the total number of teachers employed at the schools. Demographic information was obtained from each participant on a form that was distributed before the start of each focus group meeting and collected prior to beginning the discussions. Upon completion by each participant, the form was provided to the facilitator for compilation. See Table 2. Focus Group 1 had both female and male participants; Focus Group 2 had only male participants. Focus Group 3 had only female participants. Only Focus Group 1 had minority participants. Of the 14 educators, 3 participants had teaching experience that ranged from 0-3 years, 9 participants had teaching experience that ranged from 4-7 years, 1 participant had teaching experience that ranged from 13-15 years, and only 1 participant had over 15 years experience.

Table 2

Demographic Profile of the Participating Educators in Focus Groups

Group	N	Gender		Race				Years of Teaching Experience				
		<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Black</u>	<u>Asian</u>	<u>Other</u>	<u>0-3</u>	<u>4-7</u>	<u>8-12</u>	<u>13-15</u>	<u>15+</u>
FG 1	5	2	3	3	1	1	0	0	3	0	1	1
FG 2	5	0	5	5	0	0	0	2	3	0	0	0
FG 3	4	4	0	3	0	0	1	1	3	0	0	0

The educational qualifications of the participants varied across groups and within groups. In terms of teaching endorsement, with the exception of the Focus Group 3, all of the participants were provisionally endorsed in Special Education. (See Table 3.) Three of the participants from the third focus group were endorsed in secondary general

Table 3

Areas of Teaching Endorsement and Licensure Status of Focus Group Participants

Group	General Education			Special Education			License Status	
	<u>Elementary</u>	<u>Middle</u>	<u>Secondary</u>	<u>LD</u>	<u>ED</u>	<u>MR</u>	<u>Provisional</u>	<u>Licensed</u>
	(1-5)	(6-8)	(9-12)					
FG 1	0	0	0	5	5	0	5	0
FG 2	0	0	0	5	3	2	3	2
FG 3	0	0	3	0	1	0	4	0

education. With respect to licensure status, 12 of the participants had provisional licenses and 2 were fully licensed. Focus Group 2 had 5 teachers provisionally endorsed in one or more areas of special education. Of the 14 participants only 3 teachers were certified in general education content at the secondary level.

Characteristics of Students in Special Day Schools

Students attending the three special day schools selected were identified as having ED as determined by a public school eligibility team. All school divisions that placed students in these private day schools utilized the federal definition of emotional disturbance in the IDEA as a guide to their eligibility for special education services.

The participants described their students as having characteristics of students that included impulsive, disruptive, and aggressive behaviors. Described behaviors also included but were not limited to fighting, throwing objects, self-injurious behaviors, refusal to respond to others, and refusal to complete assignments. Other behaviors that were described as more internalized included behaviors such as loneliness, depression,

and chronic sadness. Deficits in students' abilities to exhibit self-control and insufficiencies in cognitive, social, and problem-solving skill areas were also depicted across the focus groups. Students attending the day schools were described as often misreading social cues among peers and adults, and subsequently become embarrassed, confused, or angry. When combined with frustration, fear, anger, or other emotions, negative behaviors with peers and adults occurred.

Children who were not identified as ED through a formal evaluation process were also permitted to attend PS 3, and in such cases were placed by their parents in the school rather than by the local school division. These students were described as bright, unmotivated, and often displaying many behaviors associated with ED at various times but less consistently than those students classified as ED. In such cases where parental placement was involved, the teachers did not follow the same requirements such as IEP implementation, progress reporting, and re-evaluation as they did for special education students placed by the public school divisions.

Focus group participants also describe their students as having traits often associated with specific learning disabilities (SLD) as defined by Turnbull, Turnbull, Shank, and Leal (1995). Some students with ED in private day schools were also described as having poor academic skills, attention difficulties, poor organizational and study skills, and lack of confidence in their academic abilities. All three focus groups indicated students with learning disabilities, and other conditions such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and speech language disorders were appropriate for placement in their facilities since these conditions often co-exist with emotional disabilities.

Overview of Findings

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the professional responsibilities of teachers in special day schools serving secondary students with ED. Danielson's (1996) instructional framework for teaching and learning comprised the structure for the study with professional responsibilities comprising the fourth domain within the framework and the filter through which the data for the inquiry were structured. The findings are presented in the form of categories and themes that address the three research questions pertaining to the professional responsibilities of teachers, the professional needs of teachers, and how their administrators support them.

The special educators in this study perceived their professional responsibilities as multi-faceted with the intent to improve the academic and behavioral outcomes of their students. Knowing the content of the subjects they were charged with teaching was an identified responsibility and included points of discussion regarding academic subjects, SOL driven curriculum, and issues surrounding highly qualified teacher status. Teachers believed that designing instruction was a key responsibility, and meaningful and differentiated instruction, and teaching life skills were essential to their students' success. Assessing student learning, the use of ongoing and authentic assessment, and documentation of student progress were considered essential professional responsibilities. From a behavioral aspect rather than an academic one, monitoring student behavior through the consistent implementation of behavioral systems, and teachers serving as role models were acknowledged as key responsibilities. Participants described communication with parents and agencies with commitment to parents, and linkage to agencies closely associated with parent communication.

Teachers indicated the need for ongoing professional development practices. This notion was supported when teachers discussed the need to access resources, participate in shared training opportunities, and use instructional and behavioral support models within their schools. Teachers also identified administrative support and participation as a critical professional need and believed that shared decision-making, strategic planning for long-term programming, and physical access to administrators were necessary if they were to make a difference in student performance.

When participants described the level of responsiveness from their administrators, they identified a need for consistent performance evaluation, self-assessment, peer observation, and the provision of resources. Collegial support with ideas surrounding collaboration and extended and flexible learning opportunities among colleagues were identified discussed as currently available but also an area where additional support would be meaningful.

The next section is organized by the three research questions asked of the focus group participants and includes a description of the resulting categories that are followed by themes that support the categories. See Table 4 for a visual representation of the categories and themes as related to each of the three research questions as described by the focus group participants.

Description of Professional Responsibilities

Throughout the discussions surrounding the professional responsibilities of teachers in private day schools, participants readily addressed their obligation to know

Table 4

Professional Responsibilities, Needs, and Supports of Special Day School Educators

Research Focus	Categories	Themes
Professional Responsibilities	Knowing Content	Academic Subject Focus
		SOL Driven Curriculum
		Highly Qualified Status
	Designing Instruction	Meaningful, Differentiated Instruction
		Life Skills
	Assessing Student Learning	Ongoing, Authentic Instruction
		Documentation of Student Progress
Monitoring Student Behavior	Implementation of Behavioral System	
	Role Models	
Communicating with Parents and Agencies	Commitment to Parents	
	Linkage with Agencies	
Remaining Current through Professional Practices	Commitment to Professional	
	Development	
	Collaboration and Reflection	
Professional Needs	Professional Development Practices	Access to Resources
		Shared Training Opportunities
		Instructional and Behavioral Support

(table continues)

Table 4 (continued)

Professional Responsibilities, Needs, and Supports of Special Day School Educators

Research Focus	Categories	Themes
	Administrative Support and Participation	Shared Decision Making Strategic Planning for Long-term Programming Access to Administrators
Professional Supports	Administrative Responsiveness Collegial Support	Performance Evaluation Self-assessment and Peer Observation Provision of Resources Collaboration Extended Learning Opportunities

the academic content being taught. Designing instruction to meet the diverse needs of their students was a commonality among the participants. Assessing student learning through pre-testing, posting testing, and through the use of ongoing authentic assessment was a highly noted area of responsibility. Monitoring student behavior, and communicating with parents and community agencies were also identified as essential Responsibilities. Finally, the desire to remain current in the field through ongoing professional growth activities was emphasized among participants as a key professional obligation.

Knowing Content

Knowing the content was the first category that depicted a professional responsibility as perceived by the focus group participants. The themes that supported content knowledge included (1) academic subject focus, (2) SOL driven curriculum, and (3) highly qualified status, and are described in this section.

Teachers in private day schools reported a shift in programming for their students. They discussed the movement toward content based programming for students with ED as opposed to a behavioral focus that had previously been at the heart of private schools or self-contained programs for students with challenging behaviors. Teachers believed the impetus for this change was the implementation of NCLB (2001) and the issues surrounding accountability, state and local assessments, school accreditation, and the federal requirement for schools to achieve adequate yearly progress (AYP).

Focus group participants discussed their responsibility to understand the subject matter and their students' interests, skills, abilities, and experiences they brought to the classroom. Teachers spoke of a "connection" between students' opportunities to learn and their achievement, and expressed their concerns with limitations in implementing the required curriculum as directed through State standards, in a cohesive and systematic fashion. Participants articulated their interest in a strong academic program for their students, which prior to the standards movement they concluded, was not in the forefront. They felt badly that the implemented curriculum was not always the required curriculum, and the students' mastery of the content was impacted by this practice. This was especially distressing to teachers since they believed underachievement is a primary characteristic of students with ED. Teachers identified lack of content knowledge, multiple preparations for subjects taught, and the need to teach other

skills in addition to the content as reasons for inconsistent implementation of the required curriculum.

Teachers in the study discussed the need for a cohesive, well-planned, and monitored curriculum and concluded it was not put into practice in the private schools. There was an identified need on the part of the teachers to plan and map out what specific components of academic content will be taught and on what schedule however, an organized implementation of the content was lacking. Teachers acknowledged a responsibility to know the curriculum as well as enhance their ability to the long term planning needed to cover the academic subjects adequately.

Academic subject focus. Prior to the academic content being the focus for students in special day schools, the classrooms were self-contained; students had little movement, if any, between academic classes, and teachers were responsible for preparing and teaching multiple subject areas. Although this model continues to be the standard in PS 1, the largest of the three special day schools, participants reported that more consideration is now given to teachers' interests and expertise in content, and there has been more discussion among the staff to consider other scheduling options. One teacher commented with the following:

We now have our four cores in the morning, and then we have lunch, and its split up differently than in the past. We have what we call creative exploratory, health and PE, social skills, and “group” in the afternoon. (FG 2, p. 5)

“Group” was structured time set aside daily with four to six students for counseling and application of social and emotional skills. IEP goals are also addressed during this period of time. With regard to scheduling another teacher noted, “The way we now place kids based on which SOL they need to take helped immensely this year, and we think the kids have been

responding to the schedule. We are seeing more gains in this model of letting them switch classes” (FG 2, p. 4).

In general, focus group participants appeared excited about the notion of more flexibility and adjusted schedules in an effort to be better prepared and more knowledgeable themselves about the content areas. These secondary school teachers discussed the need for alternative scheduling options in order to provide time for content teaching. Severe student behaviors that required close supervision were identified as limitations to creating content specific classrooms:

The kids couldn't change or move... I have always taught certain subjects such as language arts. I know that those are my strengths, so I prefer to teach those classes. I wouldn't mind going to another teacher's classroom and teach that while they switch and go into my classroom and teach an area I am not comfortable with or I don't really care for too much. The most difficult part is the students going from one room to the next. We do it for math, but it's difficult for just one period. You have to be a policeman with them switching, and we only have five rooms, but it is a long five rooms, and we really have to be on guard just in that five minutes a day. (FG 1, p.19)

SOL driven curriculum. Teachers noted that preparing and teaching content required by state standards has become a driving force in their day school programs. Participants noted their need to focus on the content and prepare their students for SOLs and high stakes assessments. Teachers admitted that they make adjustments to the content and make personal decisions about what to teach, as they believe appropriate for their students. They acknowledged that no predetermined standard curriculum is in place and a variety of teacher-selected materials and texts are utilized. Private school teachers work with multiple school divisions who utilize their own curriculum, pacing guides, and maps for curricular implementation. Teachers reported that

they often search independently for texts and supplemental materials to support the curriculum. The curriculum was often inconsistent with the public schools, and little communication existed with the public schools regarding students' academic achievement in the content areas. One teacher expressed:

I have seen a real transition from how it used to be. We were about teaching these children behaviorally first and learning [content] second. And why couldn't I do both together? I think we have gradually transitioned. It used to be that we weren't taking SOLs, and they did not drive our curriculum. We are to the point where it's all about the SOLs. It is not the way you are supposed to do it, but we sometimes measure how successful we are with what we teach by how well a student performs on an SOL, which is not necessarily a very good measure with these students' growth. Some kids are very capable of doing well. What's important is to know you taught that material along with critical life skills, and they have learned throughout the year. (FG 2, p. 7)

One private school educated students from a locality that was not mandated to participate in state assessments. Similarly, students who were privately placed by parents in day schools were not required to participate in state assessments. However, "the majority of students participate in SOL testing" (FG 2, p. 3), and the students' test scores are reported to the public school district where the student would have attended. Scores are then reported to the school within the district where the student resides and calculated into the final analysis that determines if that school achieves AYP. Teachers were concerned with the added pressure being applied from the public schools for privately placed students to perform to higher academic standards. One teacher stated the following:

With the push for AYP, we really saw that trickle down to us because they [the local schools] want their kids to do well, and that makes sense. (FG 2, p. 9)

Highly Qualified Status. Focus group participants also discussed additional pressure and responsibilities stemming from the “highly qualified” requirement mandated under the IDEA (2004). As specified in the federal law, special education teachers were required to have a license to teach with a special education endorsement, and complete specific academic content requirements as identified through the State. At the time of the interviews it had not yet been determined that these requirements would not apply to teachers in private schools as they did for public school teachers, however fears associated with the likelihood of needing additional courses or maintaining other qualifications in each content taught were apparent. Teachers were highly sensitive to the potential possibility that they would have to possess a content area endorsement in each subject they taught in addition to holding an endorsement in special education. They found this a highly complex situation to comprehend, and believed their ability to meet this requirement was impossible. Since conducting the study it has been clarified that teachers in private day schools are not held to the highly qualified requirement as they are within public schools (Virginia Department of Education, 2005). One teacher exclaimed:

Surely I’m not expected to become certified in biology, algebra, and mathematics. I’m already certified in English and special education. It’s ridiculous! I just finished my master's. I have all of my endorsements, and I still don’t know what my fate will be. That is the most frustrating thing for me right now. (FG 2, p. 10)

Other group members shared the same apprehension. Their worries were expressed as they somewhat jokingly referred to an eternal life in college courses, training sessions, and workshops with one another. Multiple teachers offered comments and expressed concerns with

limited time to complete the needed coursework, financial constraints, and their ability to juggle effectively the many daily tasks in their personal and professional lives.

Designing Instruction

Designing instruction was the second category that represented a professional responsibility as perceived by the focus group participants. The themes that supported this category included (a) meaningful and differentiated instruction and (b) life skills. These themes are described in this section.

Teaching the academic content was depicted as a priority, but the need to provide meaningful instruction related to personal life skills, while continually emphasizing high academic standards, was determined to be just as essential. The participants saw it as a professional responsibility to design instruction to meet the diverse needs of the students in special day schools. They believed the problem of poor academic performance of students with ED takes on added importance because of the academic standards associated with NCLB as well as with the requirements for participation in statewide assessments. There was a global feeling among the participants that students with ED are more likely to drop out of school than students with other disabilities; therefore, making the instruction meaningful was critical.

Meaningful, differentiated instruction. Participants agreed that students with ED often lack motivation, and indicated the design of their lessons had to be creative, engaging, and relevant to the students' life experiences. They believed that learning opportunities outside of the classroom setting was not only motivating and beneficial for this population of students, but necessary for students to remain motivated and apply the knowledge in the natural setting. Teachers noted a variety of family backgrounds that impacted the students' exposure to cultural experiences outside of their home and school. Participants displayed a sincere desire to design

innovative and enticing lessons in an effort to expose students to many learning opportunities that many of their students would not have otherwise. One teacher stated:

We are always looking for something different. I am trying to plan a full-week trip to the Appalachian Mountains. We would cover history, literature, math, and of course physical education. It's thinking way outside the box for these guys. (FG 3, p. 3)

Another teacher noted the following:

Although we follow a curriculum, we also have to make sure that what we teach them is actually going to have some kind of use for them. You can sit here and teach academics and so forth, but you have to make it relevant to them and build on whatever background knowledge they have so they can make sense of the content and make it useful. Of course, it all comes down to making sure that their individual needs are met. (FG 2, p. 3)

With regard to the same topic, another teacher replied, "We say we teach the SOLs, but we have to teach much more. We incorporate within the curriculum whatever is necessary because we continue to make the guiding light the individual student who needs a different way, and this is why he is here or she is here" (FG 3, p.7).

These teachers reported the time spent planning and designing instruction outside of the typical school day or structured schedule was a primary responsibility. A participant noted the following:

The extra three to four hours a day is critical to making sure that differentiated instruction is adhered to and every kid is receiving their due instruction with the individual in mind, not just the topic, the subject, the class, or theme. I find that is my major responsibility to teach every individual according to how they learn, and it takes an extreme amount of extra time outside of each workday to do that. (FG 3, p. 1)

The responsibility to differentiate instruction was not viewed as a burden, but simply as a requirement to the teaching profession. The participants perceived that all teachers, including those in public schools, have a responsibility to adjust the curriculum and make it applicable to each and every student. They felt that particularly in the day school setting, there is an even greater responsibility to differentiate instruction since additional emotional and social factors often negatively impact the learning outcomes of their students. Participants shared a strong commitment to continually attempt to understand their students' needs and the ever-changing variables that affect their students' ability to learn and grow. The teachers also felt an additional responsibility for students who had lacked family involvement, were deprived of cultural opportunities, were moved among foster homes, and who overall were perceived by the teachers as having greater emotional and social needs.

Life skills. The relationships that develop between the students and teachers were considered unique when compared to public school situations and guided the process for determining the necessary skills to teach. Working with a smaller number of students allows for a greater understanding of the students' needs. One teacher reported, "We have to take that relationship beyond school and process our lesson plans, or whatever we do to get them the academic education plus helping them in life learning lessons as well" (FG 3, p. 3). Another participant reiterated the following:

I personally feel that teaching life skills is one of our biggest responsibilities. Dealing with the academics is just one portion of our job, but a lot of our students are here because they really don't know how to conduct themselves in a typical real life situation. So trying to give them tools to deal with those frustrating situations is one of our biggest responsibilities. (FG 1, p. 3)

Teachers felt strongly that they must be creative in developing lessons that promote and provide meaningful learning. Teachers noted their challenges associated with designing and delivering lively and creative content and disclosed that it is often difficult to motivate students when they do not have prior knowledge of the subject, often have limited parental involvement, and are often unmotivated to meet the challenges of academic tasks. The participants displayed a dedication to their belief that they must design academic instruction that is motivating and challenging while preparing students for real-life situations that lie ahead.

Assessing Student Learning

Assessing student learning was the third category used to describe the professional responsibilities of teachers. Two themes supported this category and included (1) ongoing and authentic assessment and (2) documentation of student progress.

Participants discussed their desire to assess their students through the use of on-going, meaningful, and authentic assessment tools. They described their desire to develop their students into productive citizens by demonstrating specific skills and competencies, and to apply the skills and knowledge they have mastered within the classroom setting into the real world setting. Teachers made little reference to the SOL assessment as a means to measure their students' academic performance. With the exception of students from private school A, who were not required to participate in a state assessment program, teachers made it clear that their students take the SOL tests, and results are reported to the local school division. Participants did not elaborate on their use of the SOL assessment as a tool for measuring their students' progress of academic subjects, nor did they discuss how an analysis of test items could be used to determine content and skills taught by the teachers.

Ongoing, authentic assessment. Participants described the need to conduct ongoing and authentic assessment as a means to evaluate students' abilities in “real-world” contexts. Teachers talked about the need to teach students how to apply their skills to authentic tasks and projects, while honing in on students' analytical skills. Participants stressed their responsibility to teach the integration of skills across multiple settings while emphasizing the importance of working cooperatively and collaboratively with peers, a task that they concurred is often very difficult for students with ED. As expressed by one teacher:

I do a lot of testing and re-testing using different formats and modalities. A portfolio is a great tool for assessing. It's sometimes hard because it's time consuming. I want to make sure I do a good job and accurately assess the students. Through time, we can see if they are acquiring the skills. (FG 1, p. 5)

Documentation of student progress. The participants discussed the continual task of monitoring the students' acquisition of academic, social, and emotional skills by keeping students and parents informed through the IEP process. Noting mastery or progress toward annual IEP goals was determined to be an essential responsibility as well as an expectation of the public school staff. One participant stated the following:

As case managers there is a lot of paperwork that we have to take care of that teachers may not do in the public schools. We have forms from many different school divisions, six-week report cards, nine-week report cards, and interims every three weeks, four weeks, and through mid-year and end of the year summaries. That doesn't include all the documentation for behavioral and emotional progress. (FG 2, p. 13)

Although the documentation was viewed as time-consuming and somewhat frustrating for certain teachers, it was viewed as essential in determining student progress. Concerns

expressed with the amount of paperwork were similar to those concerns made by teachers who previously taught in public schools as well as private settings. One distinguishable difference noted by teachers was the number of assorted IEP forms since multiple school divisions placed students in private schools. Overall responsibilities and requirements for completing documentation pertaining to academic progress appeared comparable to public schools, however data collected for behavioral analysis and reporting is an area of concentration and an expectation that is expected to remain given the behavioral aspect of private day schools.

Monitoring Student Behavior

Monitoring student behavior with the goal of reducing undesirable behaviors was the fourth category and described by the teachers as a major function of each day school program. Professional responsibilities associated with the implementation of behavioral systems and role modeling for students was a common notion among participants. Teachers believed it was their role to secure knowledge of the students' approaches to learning and changes necessary during instruction in response to the students' behaviors. Teachers shared their commitment to learning new positive behavioral support strategies and methodologies and were stimulated with the discussion pertaining to consistent, fair, and responsive practices within the school setting. They believed there was never enough time to collaborate on the behavior of individual students, and the more discussion that ensued following a behavioral incident, the more they would learn from each other in how to handle particular situations. Participants described their commitment to serving as role models to students with ED and identified the need for students to view them in this way.

Implementation of behavioral system. Teachers articulated the importance of closely monitoring students' actions and felt that it was necessary for the long-term development of

student behavior, parental involvement and carry over at home, and for the overall assessment of the behavioral component of the school program. One teacher responded to this topic by saying, “Keeping track and responding to behaviors is a science. It’s the constant and consistent monitoring of educational and behavioral progress that is our responsibility” (FG 1, p. 1). Another teacher noted, “We have to make a conscious effort to implement the same behavioral level system. Consistency among all of us is really important” (FG 1, p. 3). Another participant commented, “Along with our counselors, we are doing a lot of paperwork related to behavior management on a daily basis. We have point sheets, charts, a reward system, and contracts. This is the behavioral management side of things that really helps our program” (FG 2, p. 12).

Annoyance among the teachers was observed when they talked about preparing a creative lesson and having it altered or postponed because of a significant behavioral issue that disrupts or modifies the entire class period or a portion of the school day. Teachers also acknowledged however, that this is not unusual occurrence and that is why special day schools exist. They felt they continue to learn to adapt to these situations, move on, and prepare for the next opportunity to teach creatively and effectively

Comparisons were made with teachers in regular public school settings with focus group participants indicating that there is much less concentration on behavioral monitoring in a public school setting, and more attention paid to academic progress. Teachers noted their expertise in addressing behaviors and emotional disorders, and the notion that they are learning much of the academic content areas as they continue to grow professionally.

Role models. In conjunction with the notion of behavioral responsibilities was the professional responsibility of serving as role models for students with ED in an effort to bring them along socially and emotionally. There was a sense of commitment to each student no matter

what the issues were surrounding the placement, or how intense those issues were. Dialogue revealed an obligation to address each student and family problem while setting the stage for open and positive communication. One teacher replied, “You go into each interaction thinking that hey, I am the model here. I need to model and set the tone of this interaction right now as well as later in the classroom. That is something we all strive to do” (FG 3, p. 4). The participant continued by sharing the following:

I am responsible for every moment that kid has with me. We need to hear and understand what they are saying. As a tutor, a mentor, an adult there is a responsibility in preparing myself to set up that kid’s experience with me in a positive and realistic manner. It’s my professional responsibility to make sure for that particular 45 minutes I have given something for him to walk away with. (FG 3, p. 5)

The teachers were quite comfortable discussing the behavioral component associated with their program and classrooms. They identified a desire for consistent, positive, and fair practices in responding to individual student behaviors as well as classroom and school-wide behavioral techniques. They viewed themselves as highly responsible for the use of positive strategies in promoting student outcomes, and as serving as role models for students and their parents. Participants desired changes that will be long lasting, but were realistic in their conclusions that multiple variables impact the long-term changes in student behavior. Although the teachers are committed to doing what is necessary on a daily basis, they believed that the dynamics of students’ home and community would impact the long-term prognosis of student behavior.

Throughout the discussion regarding student behavior, there was a sense among the participants that although the teachers make every attempt to remain focused on academics and

motivating instructional practices, behavior often gets in the way of their instruction. Participants viewed themselves as “managers of behaviors” and frequently they must react to inappropriate behaviors, and subsequently time is taken away from instruction. Teachers view this a perpetual challenge in private and public school ED programs and feel somewhat helpless in their ability to facilitate change. They recognize the nature of their student’s disabilities and believe that academic time often suffers due to the many disruptions that occur within their classrooms on a daily basis.

Communicating with Parents and Agencies

The fifth category pertained to the teachers’ role in communicating with parents and agencies. Commitment to parents and linkages with agencies were the themes that supported the notions within this category. The amount of parental involvement articulated by the participants varied among the schools, with the largest school serving a high number of students in foster homes and placed by the Department of Social Services. In these cases, the teachers voiced concerns and shared frustration with little follow-through at home with the implementation of behavioral interventions, consistent discipline, or in some cases little emotional attachment to the students. Participants believed the level of family involvement impacts the student’s emotional and social growth and may have an effect on their academic progress as well. Participants described the linkage with agencies tied to the school through the students as a key factor in establishing relationships and in promoting emotionally healthy students.

Commitment to parents. A commitment to each child and his/her family was clearly articulated as the participants spoke with sincerity about the necessity to communicate with families, social service agencies, law enforcement officials, or mental health professionals providing services to the student and the family in or outside of the school setting. Teachers

acknowledged that through informal observation, students are more likely to become less frustrated and more “emotionally balanced” over time with consistent discipline and positive interactions within the home. Teachers stressed their obligation to encourage consistent practices within the home, but most participants felt they were at a loss when it came to influencing the relationships between students and parents. There was an overall sense of regret among most participants when discussing positive parental involvement, however they remained optimistic with individual cases where progress had been observed.

As explained by one participant, “Some parents want to know how to take an active role. We will show them how to read things and how to help their child, but there’s often an issue physically getting them in the building” (FG 1, p. 11). One teacher expressed concern as she revealed the following:

We have a lot of families in crisis, and many struggled with their own education. One mom doesn’t have a car, one dad is in jail, one parent has mental retardation, and some are okay with fewer problems of their own. Often times we need to go to them to talk about their kids to let them know how things are going, and how they can help. Most parents really care. It’s a shared responsibility. (FG 2, p. 14)

Linkage with agencies. Participants expressed positive relationships and communication with agencies associated with families and students. Although teachers do not want direct involvement in the decisions that are made when incidents occur outside of school, they would like to know how the circumstances may influence student behavior at school or impact parental involvement. One participant relayed the following:

It’s important that we have people to help us maintain contact with our families, parents, and other community professionals. Some of our kids work with probation officers,

therapists, and psychiatrists. Sometimes it's hard to build trust, we need to constantly build those relationships with a lot of different people. (FG 2, p. 31)

Participants shared a variety of strategies to promote communication. One school utilized daily logs and phone contacts for communication with parents since many parents do not live in the community where the school is located. Teachers included parents on a variety of committees that were established in the school. Parent and teacher conferences were scheduled at times convenient for parents, Internet access for communication was set up, and social workers and counselors were used to facilitate dialogue among agency workers and the parents in a variety of settings. Efforts to include and instruct parents on the education of their students were obvious among participants. Disappointment was observed as teachers felt their attempts to collaborate with and educate parents diminish over time depending on various home and school factors. There was a sense of professional responsibility to strive for partnerships with parents even when parents resisted or teachers found it challenging limited by time constraints.

Remaining Current through Professional Practices

The final category associated with the professional responsibilities of teachers in day schools pertained to remaining current through their professional practices. Supporting themes included commitment to continual professional development, and a responsibility to collaborate with colleagues and reflect upon their teaching. Teachers expressed their interest in expanding the opportunities, methods, and content for professional growth and development. There was consensus that sharing ideas, observing practices first hand, and implementing newly learned strategies with others, or as a team would result in improved student achievement and enhanced school culture. Teachers suggested that mentoring programs would be beneficial to each teacher, whether a novice or veteran as well as to the school as a whole. They implied that their

individual performance would improve by observing master teachers either in their school, at other private schools, or within the public schools their school. Teachers spoke enthusiastically about collaborating with others in similar day program and discussing educational practices and ideas for overall school improvement.

The commitment to professional development was of particular interest to the participants since the highly qualified requirement under IDEA 2004 was in the forefront at the time of the interviews. Participants shared their commitment to enhance their subject knowledge and supported a continuous professional development model. They also felt that reflecting on their practices through ongoing collaboration with their peers was critical to their overall growth as educators.

Commitment to continual professional development. Teachers discussed their commitment to continuous professional development through ongoing education, collaboration with peers, and by reflecting on their teaching practice. There were themes of enhancing content knowledge and pedagogical skills as well as involvement in professional discussions with teachers in other special day schools across the State. One teacher shared the following:

We are all committed to not only being good teachers, but to become better teachers in the long-term through professional development. It seems like we are always taking classes and working full-time. It's a professional ethic among us here. (FG 3, p. 1)

Collaboration and reflection. The participants noted the importance of reviewing their instructional practices for accuracy, consistency, and use in future teaching by collaborating regularly with their colleagues. Finding time to collaborate and observe other teachers was discussed as an area of frustration within the day schools. One participant stated, "If I have time to stop by her room I will, but it's not at a scheduled time and it often doesn't happen" (FG 1, p.

3). Another teacher noted, “Part of being a team is the responsibility of being consistent with all of the staff within the classroom. You really have to communicate very well in order for everything to work for the students” (FG 1, p. 9).

Reflecting on teaching was evident as teachers talked about the ways they collaborate in an effort to improve student performance. One teacher spoke to reflecting on teaching in the following way:

I am always thinking about what I did in the classroom and what worked well or didn't work well so I can do it differently. Also, I go home each night thinking how I need to make meaningful contact with this student, with this text, or this material to help him reach another level. Reflection is definitely an ongoing and very positive experience. I don't think we could be effective without it. (FG 3, p. 5)

When teachers in special day schools were asked to describe their professional responsibilities, they initially and promptly focused on their obligation to knowing the academic content areas, designing instruction in such a way that would be meaningful and practical for their students, and assessing student progress. Specific concerns related to the highly qualified status required under NCLB were brought forth as teachers felt it impossible to meet such requirements. Although teachers focused heavily on their obligation to accurately assess the academic progress of their students, documents reviewed focused primarily on the behavioral and social aspect of student learning as did examples of communication systems with parents and other agencies. Teachers felt a commitment to further develop their skills as teachers and desired a model that emphasized and addressed their individual needs as novice and experienced teachers rather than accessing training opportunities that were geared to large groups of teachers.

Description of Professional Needs

The second research question posed to the participants involved a description of their professional needs as related to their success as teachers. Professional development practices and administrative support and participation were two categories that are described in this segment of the chapter. There were three themes that supported the professional development category including (a) access to resources, (b) shared training opportunities, and (c) instructional and behavioral support. The supporting themes for administrative support and participation included (a) shared decision-making, and (b) strategic planning for long-term programming.

Teachers expressed a strong desire to participate in professional development opportunities and to access resources appropriate to their specialized setting. Participants shared their strong desire to access experts in curriculum and instruction as well as behavioral supports and intervention strategies with specific emphasis on learning communities as a professional growth preference. They believed that with a curriculum expert coaching, guiding, and providing them with opportunities for professional growth, they would be more apt to implement the curriculum as prescribed thus improving student achievement.

The participants believed that their situation is unique and differs from the public school setting; therefore they believed specialized learning opportunities are necessary. Having adequate administrative support and participation included the desire to maintain staff collaboration as well as open communication with all staff associated with the private school facility.

Professional Development Practices

There was enthusiasm among the participants when they talked about their need for ongoing and suitable professional development opportunities. Participants made reference to the

limited research regarding private school practices for students with ED. Participants from all focus groups expressed a strong desire for a curriculum specialist to lead, coach, and guide them in their curriculum selection and design as well as in the delivery of instruction. All teachers felt strongly that this position should exist apart from their administrator and focus solely on instructional practices. Strong opinions were expressed regarding their desire to access fundamental content in a hassle free manner while also having a process for sharing training sessions with public schools and other private schools, and continuing their professional practices by focusing on instructional and behavioral support models.

Access to resources. Teachers reported it is burdensome to search for and locate conferences, workshops, and seminars appropriate for their populations of students while also searching for content specific topics. Teachers conveyed that they are encouraged to attend trainings that are offered locally and through the region and would be compensated financially, however the time restrictions in locating specialized offerings and pertinent content on their own seemed to interfere with their attendance. One teacher stated, “It’s frustrating because we are so unique. I haven’t been to a conference where the instructor was an expert in dealing with very oppositional and unmotivated children. We need to access trainings where the presenters have the expertise in helping these kids” (FG 2, p. 15).

The utilization of an instructional specialist to train and locate training opportunities was significant topic of conversation. One participant shared the following:

It would be great to have a curriculum specialist who knows what is happening in your classroom and can say, “Gosh, I just found this great session on history alive.” When I taught in the public school there was staff to support us with that, and there was always stuff in our box for professional development. (FG 1, p. 39)

Shared training opportunities. Teachers appeared somewhat isolated in their search for appropriate professional development opportunities. There was a clearly articulated commitment to taking courses, attending seminars, and participating in training; however, participants stated that locating offerings is often difficult. A teacher indicated, “The public schools sometimes offer trainings, not a lot, but they do invite us to join them. It’s frustrating because we are so unique. I haven’t really been to a conference or class where it’s been applicable to our student population” (FG 2, p. 15).

Teachers discussed how the providing different materials and outside activities for the students gets to the heart of being different from a public school environment. One teacher commented, “If we have the same materials and the same stuff that a public school has, what do we need that might be different in order to be successful in this setting” (FG 3, p. 43)? They discussed the structure and flexibility associated with a non-public facility, and felt the movement to a stronger instructional program required supplementary staff that specialized in training faculty members in the content and delivery of instructional best practices.

Teachers repeatedly acknowledged their differences with public school programs. They recognized their need to cover the same academic content as teachers in public schools, but expressed concerns that they are often unaware of commercially produced materials that may be advantageous to their students. They took pride in describing the ways in which they implement creative instructional activities in an effort to motivate their behaviorally challenged students, but spoke of the need for shared training in how to continue to motivate during instruction. The intensity and difficulty in providing motivation was recognized, and participants focused on the need for specific personnel to provide curricular support and instructional supervision. One teacher responded, “I’ve talked with other teachers in public schools about getting materials and

getting trainings. They talk about the great programs and materials available, but have no money, while I'm saying just tell me what it is. We have the money but don't know anything about it" (FG 2, p. 21)! Another teacher simply declared, "We just need the materials" (FG 1, p. 17)!

Instructional and behavioral support. Teachers identified a primary need to know and understand the core content areas, and also identified behavioral support and interventions to address the challenging behaviors that they attend to on a daily basis as a primary need toward their professional growth and development. This was documented by one teacher who stated, "We need to know how to recognize signs of suicide, how to de-escalate situations, how to deal with really tough kids" (FG 1, p.14).

There was both resentment and gratitude from participants when talking about mandatory trainings offered each year by the private school administration. They indicated that if there were staff to address their instructional needs, the offerings would be personalized and more appropriate for the long-term development and improvement of the school as well as the students. They spoke to staff development requirements as not always beneficial because they are "one time offerings," and a continuation of the sessions with classroom follow-up or further dialog would better meet their needs. One teacher spoke to this by stating the following:

Continuing the seminars is important. There seems to be this mentality that because some of us have been teaching 15-20 years, we know how to teach kids. Times change, things change, and there are teachers who don't feel comfortable with change. Some teachers won't teach the kids with computers, but these are kids in a computer generation.

Continuing education is not just a course, but more like ongoing communication. (FG 1, p. 13)

Sessions that involved staff from other facilities associated with their school site were viewed as advantageous. One teacher noted, “At the beginning of every school year all of the schools get together, and we do two-day joint orientation where we have presentations, sharing of ideas, projects that have been working in other schools, and conferences attended that they found to be helpful” (FG 2, p. 16). Other participants also expressed their interest in communicating with teachers in other day schools. They noted the types of issues facing private school staff such as highly qualified status, more challenging behaviors, and content teaching. It was expressed that sharing similar experiences would improve upon their level of knowledge and transfer ideas into classroom instruction.

Participants felt strongly that implementing newly learned strategies through the support of an instructional specialist would result in improved student achievement and enhanced school culture. They believed their individual performance would improve by observing master teachers either in their school, at other private schools, or within the public schools. Teachers spoke enthusiastically about sharing training opportunities with others in similar day program and the utilization of instructional and behavioral support models would be valuable to their professional growth and to the success of their students.

Administrative Support and Participation

There were common characteristics in the discussions involving administrative support and participation and its connection to professional development practices of teachers. The level of direct administrator involvement was reported as varied among participants depending on the school size and organizational structure, however all groups emphasized the need for shared decision-making regarding placement practices as well as student specific cases. Participants articulated their desire to have a collaborative approach to strategic planning for long-term

programming as it relates to materials and resources, curricular and instructional issues, and student placement considerations. Participants also stated that having access to school-based administrators, and other top-level administrators who govern the programs would be meaningful and offer benefit to them on a professional level.

Shared decision-making. Participants shared particular annoyance with the process for placing new students in their programs. Teachers stated they have no input and are rarely asked their opinion regarding factors that should be considered when enrolling a new student. Teachers described the procedure for enrolling students as one that is predominately made by the principal of the private school. They stated the private school principal receives a request from the public school staff for placement, reviews the request and student's record, and determines if placement in the private school is appropriate and likely to meet the needs of the student. Teachers believed that factors such as time-frames for enrollment, potential conflicts with other students, timing of academic units, and planning for a classroom change should be discussed with them prior to accepting a new student. One teacher responded to this topic by stating the following:

When it comes to referrals of children for placement, I would like to see a committee look at the students rather than one or two people deciding. I understand there are some decisions that have to be made in isolation, but I also know that a more collaborative, shared approach brings better results. In our particular setting that helps with meeting some professional needs and eases frustrations. (FG 2, p. 21)

Teachers concluded that following the placement of new students there is often confusion or disagreement regarding the appropriateness and preparedness of the placement. There were feelings of frustration as teachers shared their beliefs that if planning had included dialogue and open communication with them prior to the placement of new students, certain problems would

be avoided. One teacher remarked, “It can be very lonely even with other adults in the classroom if you don't feel like you have any support. If your classroom is full of students, and they have accepted one more, (and yes they have given you another aide) it's easy to get burned out trying to do everything” (FG 1, p.15). Another teacher concurred, “We know our individual classroom, and we might share kids, change schedules, and all sorts of things come into play when kids are placed. The lines of communication need to be open and developing all the time” (FG 1, p. 15).

Strategic planning for long-term programming. Participants expressed a strong desire for planning and utilization of professional training resources as part of an organizational process. They also expressed the need for high interest low readability materials appropriate for their student population. There was a willingness among the participants to locate appropriate trainings and program offerings, however all focus groups felt strongly that due to the element of time, they were not able to readily access research based instructional and behavioral programs and strategies. This moved beyond the notion of simply accessing appropriate materials and training sessions, to a concept of strategic planning focusing on continuity and long term program outcomes. As described by one teacher:

More time and freedom to utilize materials and resources would help. What we do now is very informal. I wish there was a more structured process for getting things in place and knowing what and who to go to for things. There is really no consistency in what we find or use. (FG 1, p. 16)

Another teacher concurred, “We have team meetings, but as far as structuring and sharing materials, that doesn't happen. That is what I hope to do next year” (FG 1, p.16). Additionally another teacher shared her frustration, “We don't get planning periods, and so the idea of building off of others is not very realistic” (FG 2, p. 11). Another teacher stated, “As far as

resources are concerned, we tap into what is out there on websites through professional organizations, and we try to stay on the cutting edge when we can. It's tough to find the time" (FG 3, p. 39).

Access to administrators. Teachers concurred that their immediate administrator is sensitive to their professional needs, but is not always able to provide the direct assistance that they may need. In addition to the daily operations of a building level administrator, principals of private day schools are involved in the organizational issues associated with governing boards, other school sites, and multiple school divisions. It was felt that within the current structure the teachers' involvement in the day-to-day managerial matters restrict their time to curriculum development and instructional programming. Participants acknowledged the emotional support provided by their principal, but concluded the level of involvement from other administrators within the private school hierarchy is inadequate. One teacher emphasized the following: I think we definitely need a stronger sounding board. The administrative oversight outside of our principal doesn't exist. It really doesn't. He [the principal] is awesome at what he does, but beyond him, we don't have anyone that has any real connection with what goes on here. I think that works against us. They fail at that level to acknowledge all the good stuff that is going on. (FG 3, p. 45)

There was a feeling among the teachers that if top-level administrators fully understood the challenges they face, or visited the facility they would feel supported. Participants stressed the need for a forum to address their opinions and provide input. One teacher stated, "Sometimes I get frustrated with a top-down management approach. I think a lot of our professional needs could be met if there was more of a shared decision making process" (FG 2, p. 21). Another teacher added, "I think you get more people to buy into the decision if they had been able to give

feedback into it. You will start to see more frustration as the year goes on when you get more of that top-down stuff” (FG 2, p. 21).

Teachers from two of the three schools were concerned with the limited number of visits from individuals on the governing boards or other chief administrators associated with the private school operations. Additionally there were feelings of frustration when discussing the purpose of the visits made by the administrators. One teacher replied, “The administration up there rarely comes down, if ever. When they do, I think we all would say 90% of the time it’s negative. Very rarely do they come to help or to give positive reinforcement” (FG 3, p. 40). Another participant continued, “They don’t see what goes on. They see the effects of our work sometimes, but they don’t really see the process everyday” (FG 3, p. 35).

Although the participants felt strongly about the need to dialogue with higher- level administrators, and would prefer to have these individuals visit their schools, they clearly acknowledged their respect for their building level administrators. They also indicated that through their principal they are able to express their beliefs, share ideas, and feel confident that they are given the autonomy to make decisions. When discussing the topic of building-level support, one teacher expressed the following:

It’s one of those things where I might want to try something new, and I’ll get feedback on it, and expect everyone else to give me feedback too. If it bombs, I am going to hear about it. If it’s good, I am going to hear about it. Having this freedom is really cool. His message is that we have faith in you, you have something to offer, and we believe in what you are trying to do. (FG 3, p. 7)

Administrative support and participation was conveyed as a professional need for participants in each group. Teachers articulated their desire for shared decision-making with

regard to instructional issues as well as administrative matters such as student placement and its potential impact on classroom design and management. There was also a desire among participants for long-term strategic planning for overall instructional and behavioral programming within each private day school. Access to building level administrators was recognized as a positive means to provide emotional and instructional support to teachers, while visits or open dialogue with top-level administrators outside of the daily operations of the school would provide a means to recognize the work they do and offer valuable insight for future administrative decisions.

How Professional Needs are Supported

The third research question asked of the participants addressed how their administrators support their professional needs. Administrative responsiveness and collegial support emerged from the data. The themes that supported administrative responsiveness as described by the teachers included (a) performance evaluation, (b) self-assessment and peer observation, and (c) provision of resources. Teachers discussed their need to pursue feedback from their administrators as it applied to performance evaluation, including the process of self-assessment and peer observation. Participants identified (a) collaboration and (b) extended learning opportunities as a means of collegial support. The topic of collegial support was apparent as participants discussed a high level of mutual respect and support among school staff, a desire for communities of learning, flexible and extended learning activities, and a collaborative approach to long-term planning for professional development. Teachers believed that their individual growth as well as the positive development as a team of educators leads to academic success for their students

Administrative Responsiveness.

Participants described different types of support from their building administrators. They noted the many responsibilities their principals maintain that are not primarily associated with instructional support, but rather with administrative practices, and wished that more time were available to enhancing instruction. Participants welcomed the process of evaluation and feedback, and believed the self-assessment process to be beneficial with adequate time to reflect on best practices with their administrators and colleagues. Providing materials, supplies, training opportunities, and other forms of professional development were themes discussed among the participants related to administrative support.

Performance evaluation. Teachers articulated their preference for more frequent classroom observations and feedback from their administrators during the delivery of instruction indicating that they need objective responses to their performance. They felt they could not improve as teachers without this level of supervision. As said by one teacher, “If you had a concern problem in terms of how you are teaching, or questions about a specific content, she would be there. If there is a problem, she helps a lot. She has been sensitive to our needs” (FG 2, p.35). There was an implication that a concern or question had to be initiated by the teacher since there are so few times when the principal observes a teacher firsthand with the goal of providing instructional feedback. Another participant reiterated a similar opinion by asserting the following:

I think we would all be in support of her having an assistant principal or additional help. I think it’s been presented before, but it just hasn’t happened yet. She is so busy. She may be in another school, with staff, or in meetings. (FG 1, p. 34)

Participants from two schools discussed the lead teacher's role in assisting the administrator to complete teacher evaluations and offer instructional feedback to teachers. Although they concluded that this evaluation model is an attempt to provide them with more feedback, it often is not realistic due to time constraints of the lead teacher. As described by one participant who served as a team leader, "Evaluations are twice a year. I am supposed to give an evaluation and observe the teachers in the classroom. It's very difficult for me because I teach most of the subjects, so I don't get to do this as much as I should and as much as I want to" (FG 1, p. 34).

Participants from all groups articulated positive intentions on the part of their building administrator when issues of instructional feedback through classroom observations were discussed. Teachers shared examples of why it was difficult for their administrators to provide consistent feedback and suggestions for improvement of instruction and behavioral interventions to them. They relayed issues such as meetings with parents, attendance at other facilities, budget sessions, and general school-wide administrative responsibilities as reasons for limited response. Although teachers recognized the lack of feedback as a barrier to their professional growth and overall program improvement, there were feelings of understanding and sympathy for their administrators rather than a sense of neglect and avoidance on the part of their administrators.

Self-assessment and peer observation. Additional dialogue surrounded the utilization of self-assessment and peer observations as methods to assist in the professional growth and development of teachers. Teachers felt somewhat isolated within their own classroom, had limited observations from their administrators, and believed that a self-appraisal and subsequent peer observations would be beneficial in improving their performance. Teachers did not discuss

types of formal self-assessment tools, and participants admitted that they had not taken the initiative to conduct a self-assessment on their own.

Participants were prompted to elaborate on their definition of peer observation, and described it as an informal and flexible process where the more experienced teachers review the teaching performance of the more novice teachers through classroom observation and examine the course design, course content, and use of instructional materials. Observations of classroom behavior were intended for reviewing the teaching process and its relationship to learning with a focus on verbal and nonverbal behaviors of both the instructor and the students in the classroom. It was the hope of the teachers that peer observations would provide comments from their colleagues regarding the relationship between instructor acts and student behaviors, comparison with methods peers consider to be effective, and specific suggestions for teachers to improve teaching and learning. One teacher exclaimed:

I would like to use each other [for observations and feedback] because I would love to be criticized and I never have been, and I want to be. I have said that to the counselors and they just look at me like I am crazy. I would love that! (FG 2, p. 34)

A participant responded, “In order for us to grow, we have to be able to take positive criticism and be comfortable with it. I think that [peer observation] should be ongoing” (FG 1, p. 35). Another participant elaborated on the topic by stating the following:

You want to be able to give constructive and positive feedback. It’s hard to give criticism to certain people. Sometimes honest feedback is not necessarily appreciated, not taken the way you want it to be taken, and that is difficult. You know your group [in your classroom], and you really want everybody to be happy and work well together,

especially for the kids. If these kids see that there is not that relationship with the teachers, I think they'll pick up on that and use it in a negative way. (FG 1, p. 35)

Provision of resources. When the focus groups discussed support in terms of resources, there was variance among the groups. Certain participants had concerns regarding limited materials, supplies, and other essential instructional equipment that required funding. Other participants were more concerned with resources related to the labor and time factor associated with locating appropriate conferences, and funding for conferences and trainings. One teacher described the following:

We need chairs for rooms, we shouldn't have to search for a projector; we should have these things. The needs should be met, especially when we write the program saying we are an alternative school, and we are going to do things differently. They [the upper level administration] say they support us. Sometimes it feels like we are using glue sticks and duct tape and trying to look good. We are doing something innovative, but we are doing it from dirt and trying to make things from nothing sometimes. It feels like it anyway. It's like squeezing a lemon and it's always dry. (FG 3, p. 41-42)

Another participant shared, “ Money is an issue here across the board when you are talking about services. So when we talk about how our needs are supported, it comes back down to looking at how you can be creative when money is still an issue” (FG 3, p. 41).

A group of participants felt the utilization of funds for daily program operations had greatly improved, but at times had difficulty knowing and locating items that would be beneficial to their teaching. Regarding the availability of technology in their school one teacher stated, “It's getting better. We use to have two computers in the library; now this year we have 12 computers

in a computer lab, and every classroom with access to the Internet, and a projector. Again, if we ask for it we usually get it” (FG 2, p. 36). One participant shared the following:

If I decide there is something I want to set up, they will support that. I let my team leader know about the idea, she will check on it [with the administration], and they are okay with it. I will usually talk to them about what I am interested in with my class, my vision. Some people ask for start-up funds, and they get it. (FG 1, p. 27)

Another teacher replied with the following:

I have always found that if I find something that I think will be useful for my classroom I have been able to get it. I am trying to remember a time when that wasn't the case. Of course it can't be an astronomical amount of money, but if I say I need materials, I have been able to get them. There is always very good support. (FG 2, p. 19)

Two of the three groups of participants indicated support from their administrators regarding their attendance at conferences and other trainings. As stated by one teacher, “Sometimes we have to do the research to see what is out there, but if we find it and it's reasonable, they will support us in that” (FG 2, p. 16). Another teacher echoed the same sentiments, “If there is a seminar or something that you really want to go to, just go to the administration and they will say ‘we'll see you when you get back.’ I have never been turned down” (FG 1, p. 31).

Although there was variance of resource type and degree of significance among the participants in each school, teachers from all schools believed that there were some identifiable resources within their setting that required attention and support from their administrators. One school clearly indicated a need for their administrators to provide tangible materials, equipment, and technology. Although there was marked frustration with these limited items, teachers from

this group held upper-level administrators in the organizational hierarchy liable for limited financial support as opposed to the building level principal. Participants from the other two schools were more concerned with locating and funding conferences and training opportunities. Participants from one school described marked improvement in funding for instructional materials, but expressed dissatisfaction with the administrator's ability to locate and recommend training opportunities for them.

Collegial Support

The concepts of collaboration and extended learning opportunities were apparent as participants revealed their high level of mutual support and respect toward their fellow colleagues. Participants spoke openly about their strong relationships and sense of connectedness with one another that served as a bond to the school, program, and students. Teachers talked about the unique qualities of individuals that choose to teach in alternative settings and facing the daily challenges of students with ED. Teachers described a learning communities approach to professional development as teachers expressed a desire for flexible learning activities, shared decision-making, and open dialogue.

Collaboration. Two of the three focus groups shared positive feelings of support from related service providers including speech therapists, occupational therapists, and counselors as well as administrators. With past teaching experience in a public school setting, one teacher stated, "It was very hard before. I really appreciate that this school is exclusively for kids with severe behaviors. We get great support from the service providers like, speech and language, OT, and so forth. We have those departments close by and they help with strategies and support in reading and language" (FG 1, p. 29).

When discussing collaboration within the private school organization one teacher stated:

We will see a certain personality in different day schools, and this school has a different personality from others in that we are more open, we joke, and our kids respond to that.

We support each other by adding humor to our day. Where we see the gaps and where we experience the gaps, we support each other. We might not always be optimal, but I think that is why we stay. (FG 2, p.25)

Another colleague added, “You can see the principal associated with the school, and she will take on different roles. We can say it’s very hard sometimes, but in that sense that is why I am here” (FG 2, p. 26).

This sentiment of partnership was extended to other staff as well. Teachers in all groups spoke genuinely of the respect they had for one another, and a feeling of camaraderie was expressed. Participants provided examples of student behaviors and situations they felt could only be truly understood with other educators within the day school setting. Participants from all groups articulated their appreciation for assistance from additional staff that extends beyond the students’ primary team of teachers and has expertise in psychological services, counseling, and other related therapies. This extended group of professionals is referred to as a treatment or intervention team. A teacher shared, “That is part of what we’re all about. I have this issue, I have this behavior to deal with, please help me and tell me from your expertise with kids what has worked with kids like this in the past. The treatment team really serves to bond us. (FG 2, p. 25)

Similar feelings emerged as another teacher replied with both sensitivity and humor, “It makes you feel you are not by yourself. You have this monster child and say ‘please help me.’ I know there are 25 other people that will help me if I need it” (FG 2, p. 25). Another participant noted, “I think it’s apparent that we all care about the kids and we are here because we care and

want them to succeed. We help each other. We talk to each other on a constant basis about the students. We get along and are supportive. It's a really neat thing" (FG 1, p. 30). Another teacher interjected his perspective regarding staff support in somewhat of a humorous manner, "I feel more supported than I did in the public school. I don't feel like they [the teachers] are angry with me like the other teachers from the public school because my students were always disrupting their classroom" (FG 1, p. 30).

Teachers expressed a desire for collective, long-term program development through a collaborative approach. There was a sense that they wanted more involvement in making instructional and programming decisions as a cohesive team in conjunction with their administrator. As stated by a participant, "It doesn't matter if you are in public school or in a private day school, you have to take care of yourself and your school. It's your staff that is taking care of your program, not principals alone; it's all a team effort" (FG 2, p.23). By working collaboratively to develop the vision and goals of the school and community, participants believed their professional learning needs would also be addressed and most likely met through the process.

Extended learning opportunities. The subject of extended learning activities among the teachers beyond the more traditional teacher preparation programs was illustrated as a preferred response to their professional development. Ongoing dialogue and small group discussions, for the purpose of empowering staff to grow professionally, were identified as areas of needed support from their administrators. One teacher commented:

There are elements of [our teacher preparation program] that are so necessary that we miss. Being a new teacher I remember watching [my colleague] and seeing what she was doing and seeing what was working in her class and begging her to give me five minutes

of her time (that she didn't have to spare). I would ask, “will you help me, will you teach me, where are your resources” (FG 2, p. 28)?

Participants from two schools discussed special education teacher attrition as a concern as it related to long preparation and training for new teachers within the day schools. Participants agreed that many teachers begin special education careers with diverse backgrounds, and do not have experiences and training that fully prepare them for their positions. Teachers believed that more intense and long-term training is necessary considering the unique situation within special day schools when compared to public school settings. One teacher commented, “We all had to figure things out for ourselves. Some sort of mentoring program would be great” (FG 2, p. 28). The notion of supporting professional needs of teachers was also articulated when a participant shared:

I don't think there is a plan [for professional growth]. We do have a problem with turnover, we do have a problem with individuals who don't really understand the mission, who don't really understand the process, and are basically testing the waters.

There is a high need for special education teachers, but once again the training isn't there. (FG 3, p. 51)

Another participant commented further, “If an environment does affect the actual student learning, it has to affect the teacher. We have not put things in place to allow that person who is curious about the field to actually learn” (FG 2, p. 29). Another replied, “In general, they don't take care of us, they don't offer services” (FG 3, p. 52). A different participant concluded:

The [upper level administration] doesn't do enough to get people beyond that initial point of coming into teaching (especially for special education.) I was introduced to teaching coming out of social work, and I was given a special ed middle school class. I had never

taught, my background was in English literature. I realized that I did not want to concentrate in the area of special education, so I decided to go to content reading. But I don't think they do enough on the whole to prepare their teachers. (FG 3, p. 52)

Teachers recognized a high level of collegial support as a catalyst to their professional growth and potential for overall program improvement, and believed that long-term program and curriculum planning would enhance their abilities to grow professionally and as a team. Participants described collaboration as a key ingredient in working within special day schools and noted their mutual respect and support for one another as a unique bond and source of inspiration. Teachers welcomed the notion of extended learning opportunities, and believed that a continuing plan for professional development would also assist with issues of attrition among special education teachers.

Chapter Summary

The professional responsibilities of educators in special day schools for students with ED have been presented in this chapter. The participants described their professional responsibilities as multi-faceted with a focus on the improvement of academic and behavioral performance of their students. Knowing the content of the subjects they were charged with teaching was identified as a key responsibility. Teachers indicated that designing and implementing meaningful and differentiated instruction was essential to their students' success. Assessing student learning through ongoing and authentic evaluations was considered essential. Teachers indicated that they frequently serve as role models and conduct observations through the consistent use of behavioral interventions. Participants described communication with parents and linkage to agencies as an essential practice within their school community.

Teachers described a need for ongoing professional development practices by accessing resources, sharing training opportunities, and through the use of instructional and behavioral support models within their schools. Teachers also identified administrative support and participation as essential to their ability to meet with success. Shared decision-making, strategic planning for long-term programming, and physical access to administrators were considered necessary if they were to make a difference with their students.

Participants described a level of responsiveness needed from their administrators concerning consistent performance evaluation, the implementation of self-assessments, peer observation, and the provision of tangible resources for their classrooms. Teachers believed that they have effective relationships with their colleagues, but acknowledged more time is needed to collaborate about instructional practices. They perceived that more direct assistance from instructional experts was needed if they were to improve in their knowledge and delivery of the content. See Figure 6 for a visual representation of the characteristics associated with the professional practices of teachers in special day schools.

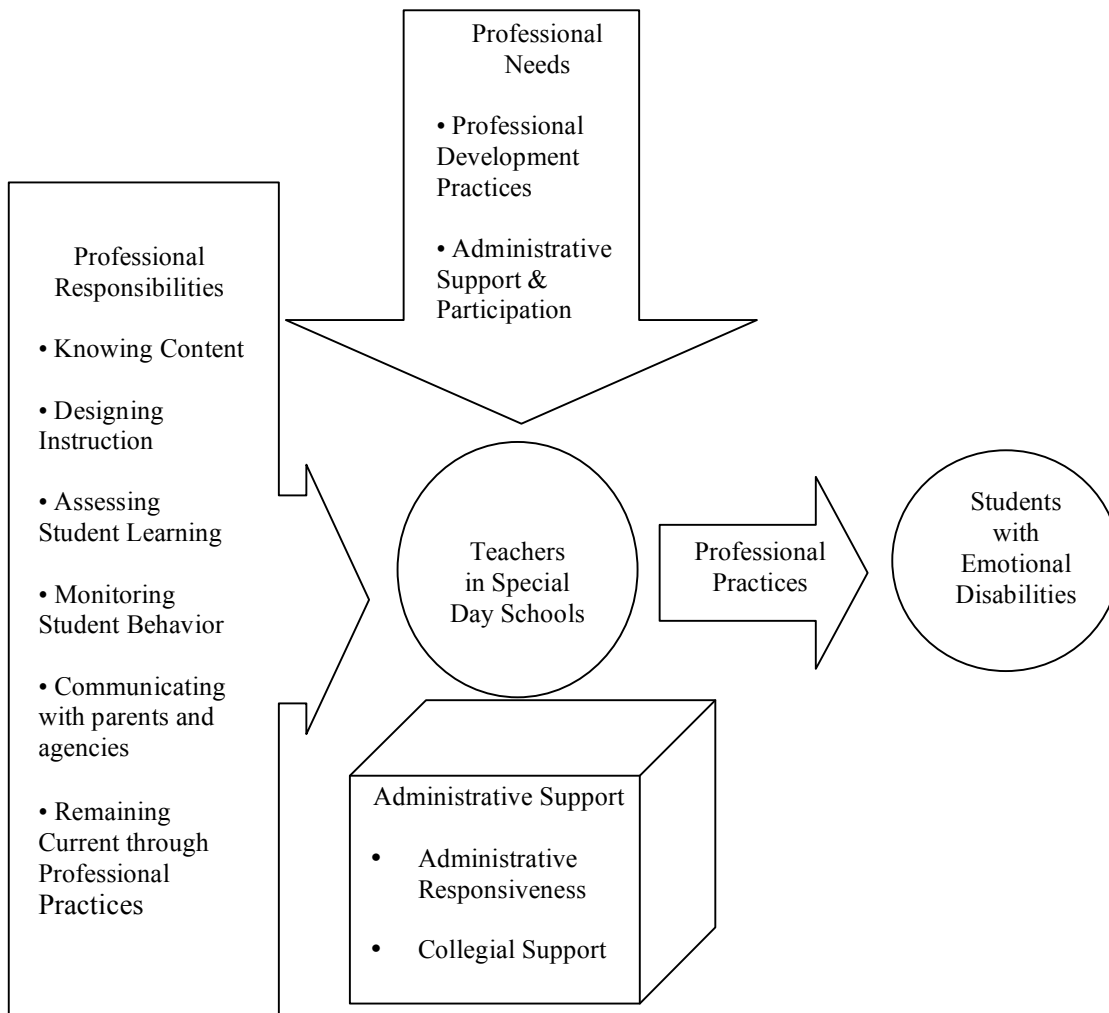


Figure 6. Characteristics Associated with the Professional Practices of Teachers in Special Day Schools Serving Students with Emotional Disabilities

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of the study was to examine how educators in private day schools serving secondary students with ED characterized their professional responsibilities, professional needs, and how they regard the support they receive from their administrators. Data were collected through focus group interviews with teachers of secondary students with ED in three private day schools. The conceptual framework for the study was based on Danielson's (1996) model of classroom performance that includes a classification system of domains, components, tasks, and subtasks of the art and science of teaching. The fourth domain within the framework is "professional responsibilities" and this domain was used to channel three research questions regarding the professional practices of teachers in special day. Throughout the study, interrelated topics emerged among all focus groups. Such categories and themes encompassed the topics of professional responsibilities, professional needs, and how administrators support professional needs. The results of this study corroborate as well as add to findings of research studies discussed in the literature review in Chapter 2.

This chapter includes limitation of the study, conclusions elicited from the research, and implications of the study for practitioners and for researchers. Finally, personal reflections on the research process are shared.

Discussion

The professional responsibilities of teachers in private day schools focused on the obligation to teach content area subjects to students with ED. Instructional responsibilities were identified by members of all focus groups and included the responsibilities of knowing the

academic content and assessing student learning. It is important to note that these areas align with the first domain of Danielson's (1996) framework, referred to as Planning and Preparation and addressed how educators organize content, understand pedagogy, design instruction to meet the diverse needs of all learners, and monitor student achievement. Monitoring student behavior, and communicating with parents and agencies were additional identified responsibilities viewed as important by the participants and were also identified within the Danielson (1996) framework.

There are specific limitations that warrant consideration. The inquiry focused on teachers in three private day schools in Virginia, and information was limited to teachers of students with ED. Twelve of the fourteen ED teachers had not completed formal teacher preparation programs, were not fully certified in special education, and all but two lacked endorsement in ED. The teachers may have biases and predispositions that affect the data brought forward. Therefore, the transferability of the results of the study is limited to schools and participants with similar features as judged by the reader.

Curricular Obligations

According to teachers in the study a cohesive, well-planned, and monitored curriculum was not put into practice in the private schools. Although there was an identified need to plan and map out what specific strands of academic content would be taught and on what schedule, an organized implementation of the content was perceived to be lacking in these private day schools. Teachers acknowledged a responsibility and desire to become better acquainted with the long term planning needed to cover the content adequately. Participants expressed frustration in having limited time to plan academically for each student with regard to the core curriculum. They indicated the content taught was often secondary in the usual dialogue that occurred among the faculty. Staff meetings, or treatment team meetings often addressed the student's behavioral

compliance, emotional status, and family dynamics. Participants spoke to the responsibility of social and emotional development of students. Communication logs for parents and staff from all private schools measured daily progress of students' specific personal and academic behaviors with minimal reporting of specific concept mastery in core academic subjects such as English, mathematics, social studies, and science. Although documents revealed daily data sheets for monitoring behavioral progress, no specific documents were provided to indicate a plan for measuring student competence in the essential four core content areas.

Concentrating on the behavioral and emotional issues of students aligns with a finding in the National Longitudinal Transition Study (National Center of Special Education Research, 2006) of public school experiences of students with ED from elementary through high school. It was revealed that limited attention is given to the academic needs of students with ED, and teachers of students with ED in public schools focus primarily on behavioral and emotional support. Students in the study received educational services in general education with various degrees of support from ED teachers within public school settings. An additional conclusion from the study was that inadequate attention given to the academic needs of youth with ED has contributed to the extremely poor outcomes of students with ED. Outcomes were defined to include high rates of absenteeism than students with other disabilities, low grade point averages, subject failure, and high levels of school drop out. Marzano (2003) spoke to instructional school-based factors as having the most impact on student achievement. Although his research stems from general education practices, Marzano's perspective is a viable curriculum must be combined with the benefit of time in order to adequately cover the necessary curriculum.

Document review and interview responses revealed subjective measures as well as "teacher made" evaluations were more frequently used for measuring students' content

knowledge and skill development while the State Standards of Learning (SOL) assessments were given to meet the school accountability issue. Teachers reported that the SOL results are returned to the child's community school and although the teachers may see the results, they often do not use the results for the improvement of instruction or analyze them to determine skill sets that the students mastered or failed. Interview data suggested State SOL assessments were administered to all students who were required to participate in the state assessment program per a schedule determined by the state and by local school divisions from which the students were referred. End of unit tests were administered by each teacher and report cards were traditional in that they identified overall subject grades without an indication of progress toward specific topics and skills. Feedback to students and parents regarding progress toward their IEP goals primarily addressed emotional and behavioral goals. Although there was a sense of obligation on the part of the teachers to ensure students' participation in the SOLs, the assessments were not used as tools for the improvement of instruction but rather to meet an obligation set forth by the state.

Findings regarding student assessment were inconsistent with a national study conducted by Gagnon, McLaughlin, and Leone (2003) depending upon the area explored. Gagnon, et al. examined public day treatment and residential schools for elementary students with ED across the country to determine accountability policies and practices. The majority of respondents in their study used assessments required by the state or local district as their primary accountability measure; however, approximately 30% of teachers and 20% of principals relied on teacher-selected assessments and 11% of participants used assessments developed by school staff. These findings were compatible with the findings in the present study. However, Gagnon et al. Determined that state assessment results were most often used to adjust instruction or curriculum and identify areas where school performance was acceptable or needed improvement, which was

not the case in the present study. The special day school teachers reported using students' results primarily for mandatory accountability purposes with no mention of improving instructional design or curriculum development.

Gagnon, et al. (2003) stressed the importance of offering day school programs for students with severe ED while also maintaining an adequate level of accountability for students' outcomes. From their perspective more awareness is necessary to ensure that students are participating in assessments with appropriate accommodations, and assessment data are reported and used for future planning. Teachers in the present study expressed frustration with the SOL requirement indicating that their students do not perform well, and the SOLs do not provide reliable data regarding their students' achievement. However, the teachers did not offer alternatives to the SOL assessment, and agreed that accountability is needed. Teachers in the present study did not seem aware of potential benefits associated with using the SOL data, and acknowledged the purpose of the assessment was to comply with testing requirements. They may have been unaware that by analyzing the SOL data of each student, or as a group of students, trends in instruction could be identified and later addressed. As in the Gagnon, et al. study private school providers and local school division representatives must share responsibility for the academic performance of students with ED who attend private day schools.

Limited Expertise

Teachers expressed significant concerns regarding licensure requirements, their limited content knowledge, and the requirement to hold an endorsement in special education. Participants agreed their formal teacher preparation programs focused on behavioral and emotional programming for students with special needs and did not stress important academic content areas. Provisional licensure obtained through alternative means was prevalent in these

special day schools. Twelve of the 14 teachers who participated in this study held provisional licenses in special education, and only 2 were fully licensed through a traditional teacher preparation program. Of the 12 teachers with provisional licenses, experiences varied considerably and included backgrounds in reading instruction, physical education, business, theology, mental health, social work, and psychology. Of the 14 participants only 3 teachers were certified in general education content at the secondary level.

These findings add to the literature of Nougaret, Scruggs, and Mastropieri (2005) who compared the reported teaching competencies of 20 traditionally licensed first-year special education teachers with those of 20 alternatively licensed first-year teachers within the public school setting. The teachers participating in their study were primarily teachers of students with learning disabilities although they served students with ED. Nougaret et al. found significant differences between alternatively licensed and traditionally licensed teachers in planning and preparation for instruction, classroom environment, and the delivery of instruction. Traditionally licensed teachers were found to be more effective in these areas of practice. According to Nougaret, et al. the provisionally licensed teachers self-reported their skills as similar to the self-reported skills of the teachers traditionally licensed, unaware of their distinct differences with traditionally trained teachers. They further concluded that it is highly likely that these differences can impact student achievement.

Teachers in the present study expressed apprehension regarding their teacher preparation programs stating they had limited knowledge of the subject matter and minimal experience teaching the academic content. They articulated a focus on classroom management, anger management, and social skill development rather than academic preparation and instructional strategies. The majority of teachers in the study were in the process of seeking licensure through

coursework requirements as prescribed through their teacher preparation programs and provided little information pertaining to the details of their teacher preparation programs.

Focus on Instruction

Monitoring student behavior was an identified responsibility that fell within the second domain of the Danielson (1996) framework (Classroom Environment). An obligation to address each individual and the behaviors brought to the classroom environment was expressed by the participants. Danielson noted that interactions with students are non-instructional; however, positive interactions are critical for effective instruction to occur. “Such activities and tasks establish a comfortable and respectful classroom environment, which cultivates a culture for learning and creates a safe place for risk-taking” (p. 31). All focus groups discussed their schools’ missions to improve student behavior, emotional well-being, and social skill development.

Evaluation and performance documents addressed the ability of teachers to reduce disruptions through appropriate, motivating, and challenging activities. Teachers in this study illustrated their efforts to individualize delivery of instruction for each student and the need to integrate functional and relevant activities into the curriculum. There was a sincere interest to provide non-traditional activities in an effort to keep students engaged, and discussion of ways to create alternative activities that are fun and challenging. These findings were in agreement with Kern et al. (2001) who noted the importance of assigning academic tasks to students with ED that are at an appropriate instructional level and functional in nature. Kern concluded that when students with ED are tasked with assignments at a higher level of difficulty, they are likely to exhibit off-task and disruptive behaviors and show an overall resistance to perform academically. He also confirmed that scheduling accommodations such as shortened task periods, functional

activities, and student choice were relevant to students with ED in providing adequate instructional time.

Marzano (2003) recognized the many variables that impact instructional time, and recommended implementing specific strategies in an effort to protect instructional time suggesting that in this era of standards-driven curriculum, a viable curriculum is unreachable without the benefit of time. He concluded, “the content that teachers are expected to address must be adequately covered in the instructional time teachers have available” (p. 25).

Although there was a desire among the teachers for high academic performance from their students, teachers found it difficult to stay focused on instruction considering the intense behavioral and emotional issues with which they had to contend. Teachers in this study described their attempts to challenge students by providing a variety of activities, sometimes outside of the school setting, while addressing the personal interests of the students at various instructional levels, a task they agreed was very difficult to achieve. Data suggested that students’ were resistant to perform academically, even when teachers believed students were capable at achieving at that level. Teachers expressed the importance of offering choices while altering activities frequently to reduce the likelihood of disruptive behavior from occurring. Teachers expressed frustration with behaviors that often interfere with plans for academic tasks, and aggressive and disruptive behaviors must be addressed for academic instruction to continue.

Participants in the study demonstrated a desire to keep academics in the forefront; however it was made clear by the teachers that academic instruction is often interrupted by student behavior, and teaching is stopped until student behavior is under control. Considering the severity of behaviors, it seemed apparent that instruction might be consistently interrupted to handle student behavior. Teachers reported that they make modifications to daily schedules, and

offer creative scheduling as a means of providing additional instruction in an attempt to make-up lost instructional time. Long-term academic outcomes as well as behavioral concerns for students in the day schools were evident as teachers in the study expressed their continual struggle for an academic focus.

These findings align with the findings of Wehby, Lane, and Falk (2003) who recognized that teacher attention to disruptive behavior is often at the expense of academic instruction. They described ED classrooms in public schools as lacking academic programming, having low rates of instructional demands, and high rates of punishment. Teachers in public school ED programs were found to devote only 30% of the school day to actual academic instruction while intensified, non-compliant, and aversive behaviors were more likely to occur. Lack of instructional time in ED programs was reported by Wehby et al. (2003) as a chronic problem associated with ED programs at all levels within public schools and is likely to have deleterious effects on the long-term academic success of students with ED.

Striving for Growth

Teachers in private day schools believed it was necessary to remain current with professional development practices. Participants from three focus groups articulated the need to remain current with research-based practices, and believed their teaching situation to be unique and therefore required individualized and group opportunities to grow professionally as educators. They also articulated the desire to have direct administrative involvement and a need for ongoing communication and collaboration with their immediate supervisors as well as affiliation with the governing board or administrative group that oversees the operations of the school. The identified areas of professional needs were contained within the fourth domain of

Danielson's (1996) framework and addressed components associated with being a professional educator outside of the classroom as well as with enhancing and sustaining the profession.

Participants articulated a desire for a model of professional development tailored to their needs as individuals with varying levels of experience and content knowledge. Teachers also discussed their desire for a school-wide plan for professional growth. Teachers in special day schools believed they strive for improvement, but feel limited by the availability of training opportunities or limited resources. Teachers noted the complex nature of professional development, and stated that their professional needs cannot be met in "one-size-fits all" type of model that often includes one time presentations and training sessions designed for large groups of teachers.

The National Staff Development Council (NSDC, 2003) promoted the movement from a traditional model of professional development to one that is enduring, self-directed, and based on a constructivist theory of learning. In a constructivist view, a teacher's knowledge is not simply received from "the experts" in training sessions, but through collaboration with peers, other professionals, and students in an effort to make sense of the teaching and learning process in their own context.

Traditional models of professional development were offered in the special day schools and included one-day teacher trainings, usually held at the beginning of each school year and often focused on the behavioral aspect of working in special day schools. Teachers from two focus groups expressed a desire for more training in the content areas indicating their teacher preparation programs focused heavily on classroom management, anger management, and social skill development rather than academic preparation and instructional strategies. This finding was consistent with Lane, Gresham, and O'Shaughnessy (2002) who discussed the little attention

given to academic content such as literacy, mathematics, and science in the majority of methods textbooks used to prepare ED teachers. Wehby, et.al (2003) also concluded that ED teacher preparation programs place a strong emphasis on the social and behavioral aspects of teaching students with ED and less emphasis on academic instruction; and without a balanced approach that includes core curricular areas, students with ED are likely to have more significant gaps in their knowledge and skills.

A plan or schedule for professional development was not a document provided by the staff in these day schools. Participants relayed that experts from outside of the school staff who are often unfamiliar with the faculty or culture of the school facilitate the trainings. Teachers indicated that administrators had minimal participation in the training sessions and there were rarely follow-up sessions to the larger scale trainings. Participants concurred that a job-embedded model of professional development was a preference in special day schools, which is in line with the NSDC (2003) that supports this approach rather than asking teachers to accept a theory conveyed in a lecture format or conference setting. The NSDC standards reflect results-driven, standards-based, and job-embedded professional development opportunities. According to the NSCD, “School divisions that successfully implement the [NSDC] standards will experience higher quality professional development, higher quality teaching, and improved student learning (p. 3).

Collaborating for Improvement

Teachers desired more influence in the policies, programs, and daily operations of their schools. Participants from two groups felt more strongly about the process of shared decision-making than participants from another group especially as it related to a systematic process for access and implementation of curriculum and professional development. There was agreement

that their immediate administrator kept them informed of decisions made from the larger governing board, but since they were responsible for carrying out the decisions, teachers believed they should have more involvement in determining those decisions.

From Glickman's (2002) perspective, the more accessible shared decision-making is to all teachers, the more positive feelings they have for the process. Glickman suggested building decision-making capacity through a slow, steady process moving from less complex to more complex issues while keeping student success and achievement in the forefront. He also suggested that as teachers become more heavily involved in shared decision-making, additional demands are placed on them. Thus, carrying out the process in small steps is more effective.

Teachers in the present study welcomed the idea of taking a leadership role in decision-making as it pertained to broad-based, school-wide topics as well as individual classroom, or student issues. They discussed multiple responsibilities that they share and are specific to their unique private school setting. Although they agreed that entering into a process of shared decision-making would entail additional time and effort they welcomed the ideas surrounding school-wide decision-making. Data from the study suggested a high regard for their working relationship with their immediate administrators within noncompetitive, trusting environments. Teachers indicated that their principal's encourage risk-taking as it applies to all aspects of teaching. Since a positive relationship with their principals appeared to be evident, teachers are in a good position to put forth their ideas in a more structured framework. Their ideas could easily be expressed, discussed as a team, reflected upon, and subsequently decisions would be made with the principal based on this collective effort.

Teachers from all three focus groups indicated their desire to receive consistent and meaningful feedback from their principal, lead teachers, or instructional experts through a

systematic observation and evaluation process. Teachers believed the use of evaluative methods over a consistent period of time would enhance their professional growth by providing them constructive feedback to their classroom instructional practices. The current process of providing feedback was viewed as minimal and inconsistent. Considering the number of provisionally licensed teachers in this study, participants expressed a keen awareness of the relationship between the improvement of instructional practices and student achievement. They shared their desire to engage in a process of self-assessment, mentoring, peer observation, and problem solving with their peers. Teachers reported that they would seek out colleagues in an effort to collaborate and elicit feedback from them. They appeared very comfortable with their peers, but also believed that they needed instructional experts to assist them in improving their content skills as teachers.

This finding aligns with Sutherland, Denny, and Gunter (2005) who determined that teachers of students with ED within a public school setting felt most comfortable collaborating with other teachers to provide educational services for their students, primarily with regard to academic instruction. Sutherland, et al. also indicated that fully licensed teachers were significantly more at ease planning lessons and addressing classroom behavior than teachers with emergency licenses. They also determined that teachers of student with ED required more effective teacher preparation programming to provide quality instruction to their students. Teachers in the present study seemed to identify areas of expertise among their peers, whether it was specific content knowledge, or management of behaviors. Teachers did not recognize or bring forth potential disadvantages of observing and getting feedback from peer colleagues who had limited knowledge of the content, experience, or training in teaching students with ED.

Conclusions

Data regarding the professional responsibilities of teachers in special day schools who serve secondary students with ED were obtained from teachers within three focus groups. The results of this study substantiate as well as add to the findings of research studies discussed in the literature. Overall, the findings suggest that most of these special day school teachers were predominantly beginner special education teachers who have a variety of backgrounds and experiences. Teachers have difficulty delivering the content since they are not well trained in subject matter. In addition the students they serve exhibit very challenging behaviors and emotional reactions that often interrupt the delivery of instruction. These issues make it difficult for teachers in special day schools to maintain a focus on instruction. Given the many challenges that exist in private day schools, teachers embrace the notion of growing professionally through collaboration with peers, through feedback from administrators or other instructional experts, and through teacher preparation programs.

The findings of this exploration support the following conclusions: (a) most of these special day school teachers were non-traditionally prepared special educators; (b) these special day school teachers were challenged in achieving and maintaining instructional focus; (c) despite multiple challenges these special day school teachers were highly motivated; and (d) these special day school teachers were provided insufficient instructional support. These conclusions are documented in the following sections.

Most of These Special Day School Teachers were Non-traditionally Prepared Special Educators.

Perhaps one of the most challenging facets facing any new special educator is their ability to effectively manage a classroom. Without effective classroom management there is minimal teaching and learning. In the case of special educators serving students with ED, the

requirements of effective classroom management are significant. Meeting special learning needs and tailoring behavioral interventions are key elements to successful student achievement. In special day schools for students with ED the issues associated with classroom management and attention to special learning needs are exacerbated. It has been clear throughout this study that the majority of teachers within the day schools have not received the benefit of formal teacher preparation in the area ED. Coupled with limited content knowledge and limited experience in a unique ED setting, the likelihood of success for both teacher and student is diminished.

As reported by the participants, their assorted backgrounds and life experiences were seen as strengths in terms of their ability to connect with students and offer non-traditional teaching activities that students with ED are likely to respond to. Teachers in the day schools came from such backgrounds as clergy, reading specialist, counselor, professional athlete, and social worker. While there is no doubt that each teacher brought valuable contributions to the classroom from which students could relate, their lack of formal teacher preparation is a concern especially in the delivery of academic content. Thus their varied backgrounds can be viewed paradoxically as both strength and weakness.

These Special Day School Teachers Were Challenged in Achieving and Maintaining Instructional Focus

There was unexpected, widespread, and early discussion in the study surrounding the responsibilities and needs of teachers to focus their day school programs on content delivery, academics, and best instructional practices. This was surprising in that day school models traditionally have had a strong behavioral focus. This academic awareness of teachers in these schools appears to be a result of NCLB requirements and mandates associated with IDEA, 2004. It is noteworthy, that the teachers realized their limited background and knowledge in the

academic subject areas and made adjustments as best they could within the parameters of their programs. With the notion of academics and best instructional practices moving into the forefront or at least parallel with behaviorally focused programs, perhaps there will be shift in the professional development and preparation for special day school teachers.

Despite Multiple Challenges These Special Day School Teachers were Highly Motivated

From the first request to access the school and speak with the staff, it became obvious that teachers in these special day schools represent a unique caliber of dedicated individuals. The administrators and teachers were very welcoming, attentive, and forthright in their willingness to participate in the study. Many participants and all administrators expressed a deep personal interest in the study. Though teachers in the study are faced with the prospect of limited opportunities for professional growth, challenging student behaviors, infrequent administrative support, and little or no time for planning, all participants expressed a desire to serve their students and to learn how to become better teachers. Their thirst for “knowing” how to be a good teacher in their setting was obvious and helped them to confront each of the barriers facing them. The atmosphere of collegial sharing, openness, and assistance was evident in each of the three schools covered in this study and well positions them for future professional growth opportunities. The sharing of instructional and behavioral ideas and open communication served as a type of “instructional therapy” in helping these teachers to overcome the many challenges they face in a unique setting. The teachers in the study were found to be exceptionally dedicated albeit overwhelmed individuals, who possessed a sincere desire to tackle the many intense needs of their students.

These Special Day School Teachers were Provided Insufficient Instructional Support

The types of support needed by teachers in special day schools varied among the groups. Participants from one of the groups perceived a distinct lack of instructional materials and supplies to the extent that they couldn't perform basic functions on a daily basis. In the two other schools, the lack of support was reported in terms of administrative intervention and follow-through. Teachers indicated minimal involvement from their principals regarding performance evaluations, classroom observations, conference opportunities, and the provision of curricular and instructional ideas during their teaching time. Both types of support are fundamental to a positive instructional environment. It was interesting to note however, that teachers from all groups did not place blame with their immediate administrator, but acknowledged that their administrator lacks the time needed to perform these supportive types of responsibilities. Additional instructional support is necessary for teachers in special day schools to become proficient in the delivery of instruction.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

The findings have a variety of implications for practice. First it is important to note there should be more emphasis on academic subject preparedness as well as concentration on behavioral practices within the teachers preparation programs. Considering NCLB and the current national trend regarding the improvement of academic performance for all students, high stakes assessment, and accountability, more attention should be paid on preparing teachers in private day schools for academic programs while still addressing the behavioral, social, and emotional needs of students. Private school administrators should collaborate with the principals from the public schools to review and discuss the essential factors in preparing for the assessments by means of curricular training, organizational timelines, and research-based

methods to enhance instruction. Jointly participating in professional development activities that emphasize content knowledge, research-based instructional strategies that assist in content delivery, and planning together for students success would be beneficial and welcomed by private school staff.

Utilizing a content expert to coach, instruct, and emphasize content teaching and best practices in the delivery of instruction to the teachers within private day schools would provide a model that emphasizes the subject matter in their natural classroom environment where skills can more readily and effectively be carried over. Day school teachers most often attend conferences or training sessions that are provided from outside sources where the skills and strategies taught are less likely to be implemented into the classroom setting. Through collaboration with public school administrators, content specialists and master teachers may share the expertise with private schools in an effort improve instruction for the students they serve and share.

Special education teachers with provisional or temporary licenses may be at a disadvantage with regard to pedagogical competencies. Twelve of the 14 teachers in the private day schools held provisional licenses to teach, and two were fully licensed. Holding a provisional license meant teachers held a four-year degree in education, or another field, completed one to two special education courses, and were required to complete specific courses leading to an endorsement in special education over a three-year period.

It is critical that close attention be paid to the current teacher licensure programs at the federal and state level and support initiatives that promote quality teacher education programs. The development of strategic plans at the local school division level to support teachers holding temporary licensure is also essential, as there seems to be a pervasive need to continue to employ unlicensed or non-traditionally licensed teachers in special education programs.

The academic progress of students with ED in private day schools should be closely monitored, allowing for instructional decisions to be data-driven. Private school principals should implement a routine assessment of the academic performance of students with ED through data collection to determine whether students are making academic gains. Although teachers were motivated to provide quality instruction, they were confident that other factors such as lack of content knowledge, interfering behaviors, and limited instructional strategies interfered with academic progress of students. Data collected through a progress monitoring approach could be used to make planning and instructional decisions that enhance educational programs and improve educational outcomes for students with ED, keeping instruction in the forefront while monitoring the progress of students' behaviors.

The need for continual high quality professional development exists and must be provided. Because a high number of teachers in day schools are not fully licensed teachers they may not be aware of the many factors that contribute to delivering effective instruction and will likely need educational experts to team with them to provide training and recommendations for best teaching practices. Caution must be taken with very inexperienced teachers who need frequent, continuous, and concrete examples regarding the art of teaching as well as the complexities of instructing students with challenging behaviors. However, teachers in private day schools appreciate working closely with their colleagues, are bonded, and therefore well positioned for a professional learning communities approach to professional development. This model of sharing, observing others, and offering feedback should be fostered by building leaders, while also linking teachers to content experts who can provide direct support and guidance in the key subject areas. To remain focused on the details of instruction and student achievement,

administrators and other instructional experts must provide direct guidance to the teachers in special day schools.

Recommendations for Future Research

As many students with ED continue to be removed from public school programs to receive their education in private day schools, it is critical to address the professional practices of teachers in private schools. Since the study involved the self-reported responsibilities of teachers in three day schools in one state, future researchers are encouraged to replicate this study to determine if similar results are described by educators in other private or public day schools. Conducting observations of teaching practices in the special day schools would provide more detailed descriptions of the types of responsibilities and the context in which they occur. Relationships among colleagues and interactions with administrators could also be observed firsthand. Future research that utilizes extensive observations could investigate in more detail the professional responsibilities incorporated into the daily routines of special day school teachers and administrators and the potential impact on student achievement.

Additionally, future research is needed to determine the professional practices teachers of students with ED working at different levels in public school settings. The results of these findings are limited to the ED teachers in three private day schools serving secondary students with ED. Future researchers are encouraged to duplicate this study to other school environments. Findings may vary considerably within a public school setting and at different levels.

Finally, future study of teacher preparation program and professional development opportunities for special day school educators would be worthwhile since all teachers noted the need for effective and ongoing training. An examination of ED teacher preparation programs

within or outside of the public school arena would be valuable in order to gain a better understanding of the efficacy of such programs.

Personal Reflections on the Research Process

As I reflect on the study, it is important to note the positive reaction from all administrators who provided access to study participants. Administrators were prompt in all responses to communications, made accommodations for their staff to be available, and demonstrated a sincere interest in the study. The focus group participants were equally receptive to take part in the study and spoke openly about their interest in the topic, dedication to the field of professional development, and gratification related to participation in dialogue and discussion with their colleagues. Teachers from all focus groups expressed positive comments and reactions to the discussions and indicated a desire to continue such a forum as means of professional growth and development. Teachers in private day schools were confident and dedicated to their students, peer colleagues, and the profession.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent for Participants of Research Project

Title: Exploring the Professional Practices of Educators in Special Day Schools
Serving Secondary Students with Emotional Disabilities

Investigators: Susan Z. Clark (researcher), Jean Crockett (faculty advisor)

I. The Purpose of this Research Project

The purpose of this research project is to examine how teachers in private day schools serving secondary students with ED characterize their professional responsibilities and opportunities for professional growth. The study will also examine how administrators provide support to their teachers.

II. Procedures

The procedures for this study include focus group discussion, field notes, and document review to examine how special educators characterize their professional responsibilities and needs for professional growth. You were selected to participate in this study based on your current teaching position in a special day school for students with ED. Focus group sessions will take approximately two hours. Focus group sessions will be audio-recorded. The participants will identify key points during the focus group with assistance from an assistant moderator at the conclusion of the session. Participants are asked to complete a demographic questionnaire to identify the composition of the group.

III. Risks and Benefits

There are no known risks involved as a participant in this study. Confidentiality will be given primary consideration throughout this study. The benefits of this study include a broader

understanding of the professional responsibilities and practices as viewed by teachers of ED students in special day schools. Recommendations for enhancement of professional practices may lead to increased student outcomes. However, there is no guarantee of benefits. Upon request, a summary of the research results will be provided.

IV. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

Your identity as a participant in this study is confidential. School and participant names will not be used during the study. Audiotapes of focus groups will be made. They will remain in the possession of the researcher and will not be shared.

V. Compensation

You will not receive any monetary compensation for participating in this study.

VI. Freedom to Withdraw

You are free to withdraw from this study at anytime. You do not have to answer questions during the focus group that you do not wish to answer.

VII. Approval of Research

VIII. Participant's Responsibilities

As a participant in this study, I voluntarily agree to the following responsibilities:

- to participate in tape-recorded focus group _____ (initial)
- to share school-based documents pertaining to professional practices

IX. Participant's Permission

I have read the Informed Consent and understand the conditions of this study. All my

questions have been addressed. I acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for participation in this study.

Signature

Date

Should I have any pertinent questions about this research or its conduct, and research subjects' rights, and whom to contact in the event of a research-related injury to the subject, I may contact:

Susan Clark

Dr. Jean Crockett

Dr. David Moore

Principal Investigator

Faculty Advisor

Chair, IRB

540-899-5487

540-231-4546

540-231-4991

sclark@staffordschools.net

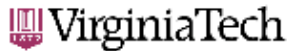
crocketj@vt.edu

moored@vt.edu

Participants will be given a copy or duplicate original of this consent form.

Appendix B

Internal Review Board Letter of Approval




Office of Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board
1880 Pratt Drive (0497)
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
540/231-4991 Fax: 540/231-0959
E-mail: moored@vt.edu
www.irb.vt.edu
FWA0000572 (expires 7/20/07)
IRB # is IRB0000667

DATE: June 21, 2006

MEMORANDUM

TO: Penny L. Burge
Susan Clark

FROM: David M. Moore 

Approval date: 1/31/2006
Continuing Review Due Date: 1/16/2006
Expiration Date: 1/30/2007

SUBJECT: **IRB Expedited Continuation 1:** "Exploring the Professional Responsibilities of Educators in Special Day Schools Serving Secondary Students with Emotional Disabilities", IRB # 05-060

This memo is regarding the above referenced protocol which was previously granted expedited approval by the IRB. The proposed research is eligible for expedited review according to the specifications authorized by 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. Pursuant to your request, as Chair of the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board, I have granted approval for extension of the study for a period of 12 months, effective as of January 31, 2006.

Approval of your research by the IRB provides the appropriate review as required by federal and state laws regarding human subject research. As an investigator of human subjects, your responsibilities include the following:

1. Report promptly proposed changes in previously approved human subject research activities to the IRB, including changes to your study forms, procedures and investigators, regardless of how minor. The proposed changes must not be initiated without IRB review and approval, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.
2. Report promptly to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.
3. Report promptly to the IRB of the study's closing (i.e., data collecting and data analysis complete at Virginia Tech). If the study is to continue past the expiration date (listed above), investigators must submit a request for continuing review prior to the continuing review due date (listed above). It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain re-approval from the IRB before the study's expiration date.
4. If re-approval is not obtained (unless the study has been reported to the IRB as closed) prior to the expiration date, all activities involving human subjects and data analysis must cease immediately, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.

cc: File
Department Reviewer: M. D. Alexander

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Appendix C

Administrative Letter for Teacher Participation in Study

January 2005

Dear _____,

As per our phone discussion on _____ part of my dissertation work at Virginia Tech this year involves research a study to explore the professional responsibilities and opportunities for professional growth for teachers in special day schools who serve students with emotional disabilities (ED). I will also examine how administrators provide support to teachers and gather recommendations for enhancing professional practices.

Data will be collected through focus groups and through a review of appropriate documents. Focus group interviews with teachers will take place after school hours, and teachers will obtain licensure renewal points for participating. Our interview will be scheduled at your convenience.

Teacher participation in this study is voluntary. It has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of Virginia Tech. I would appreciate your support in encouraging teachers in your schools to participate in focus group sessions. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Susan Clark

Appendix D

Invitation to Participate in Study

January 2005

Dear _____,

As part of my dissertation work at Virginia Tech this year, I will be conducting a study to explore the professional responsibilities and opportunities for professional growth for teachers in special day schools who serve students with ED. Data will be collected through focus groups discussions, individual interviews with principals, and through a review of appropriate documents.

You have been selected to participate in a focus group with other special education teachers in your school. As a teacher currently working in a special day school for students with ED, your participation in this study will provide pertinent information regarding the professional responsibilities and opportunities for professional growth as well as insight to enhance such practices.

Thank you for your interest in participating in the study. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Susan Clark, Researcher

Name _____

____ **Yes. I am interested in participating in this study.**

____ **No. I am not interested in participating in this study.**

Please return the bottom portion of this letter to your principal.

Appendix E
Confirmation Letter

January, 2005

Dear _____,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. Below you will find the date, time, and location of your assigned focus group. I look forward to meeting with you.

Date: _____

Time: _____

Location: _____

Sincerely,

Sue Clark

Appendix F

Questions for Focus Groups

1. How do you describe your professional responsibilities?
2. How do you describe your professional needs?
3. How are your professional needs supported by your administrator?

Question 1 included probing questions that included but were not limited to the following:
How do you reflect on teaching? Describe how you maintain accurate record keeping? How do you communicate with families? In what ways do you contribute to the school and district?

Questions 2, and 3, included probing questions associated with developing professionally and showing professionalism. Probes include but were not limited to the following: What do you need professionally to be a successful teacher? What does professional development look like in your school? How is your school administrator involved in staff development? What type of professional development would be meaningful to you?

Appendix G

Demographic Information of Focus Group Participants

1. Gender

- Male
- Female

2. Race

- White
- Black
- American Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut
- Asian or Pacific Islander
- Other

3. Years Teaching Experience

- 0 – 3
- 4 – 7
- 8 – 12
- 13 – 15
- more than 15

4. Years Teaching Experience in Special Day Schools

- 0 – 3
- 4 – 7
- 8 – 10
- more than 10

5. Type of Teaching Certificate

- Provisional (coursework or examination necessary for full endorsement)
- Bachelors Degree
- Masters Degree
- Masters + 30 additional hours
- Ed.D/Ph.D

6. Area of Endorsement on Teaching License

- General Education
 - Elementary
 - Middle (6-8)
 - Secondary (9-12)
- Special Education (please list specific endorsement area(s))

- Other (please list specific endorsement area(s))

Appendix H

Matrix of Sources of Data for Triangulation

	Sources of Data				
	Focus Group			Document	Field
	1	2	3	Review	Notes
Question 1: Professional Responsibilities					
Knowing the Content	X	X	X		X
Designing Instruction	X	X	X		X
Assessing Student Learning	X	X	X	X	X
Monitoring Student Behavior	X	X	X	X	X
Communicating with Parents and Agencies	X	X	X	X	X
Remaining Current Through Professional Practices	X	X	X		X
Question 2: Professional Needs					
Professional Development Practices	X	X	X		X
Administrative Support and Participation	X	X	X		X
Question 3: Supporting Professional Needs					
Administrative Responsiveness	X	X	X	X	X
Collegial Support	X	X	X		X

Appendix I

Matrix of Documents Reviewed

Documents Reviewed	Focus Group		
	1	2	3
Teacher Evaluations/Observations	X	X	
Individual Educational Programs (IEPs)	X		X
Behavioral/ Level System Data Sheets	X	X	
Functional Behavioral Assessments	X	X	
Behavioral Intervention Plans	X	X	X
Student Contracts/Agreements			X
Incident Reports	X		
Daily Attendance Reports	X		X
Quarterly/Interim Grade Reports	X	X	X
Faculty Handbook	X	X	X
Teacher Expectation Sheet		X	
Sample of Educational Summary		X	
Teacher Self-Assessment		X	
Parent/Student Interest and Information Sheet			X
Vision Statement	X	X	X