

Running head: SPECIAL EDUCATION STAFF

SPECIAL EDUCATION STAFF: IS THERE AN ASSOCIATION BETWEEN THE
PERSONAL EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOL STAFF AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS
STUDENTS WITH EMOTIONAL DISTURBANCE?

In (Partial) Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Masters of Arts

By
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May 2019

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 5/15/2019

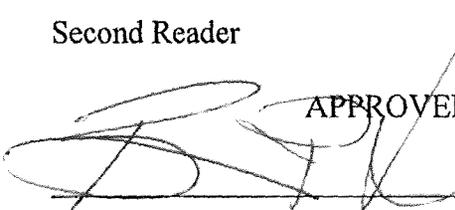
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Abstract

Previous studies have shown that positive interactions with students have strong influences on student social emotional development and achievement. Yet, there appears to be a need for more information about what differentiates the beliefs of staff towards students and the possible connections to their personal experiences outside of the work environment. To address this gap in the research, this study aims to identify if there is an association between special education staff's personal experiences and attitudes towards students with emotional disturbance. Data was collected using qualitative and quantitative sources and have explored demographic areas such as age, and gender. Using a mixed methods design, attitudes and experiences of 21 staff members at one Ventura County School were examined. The focus school is considered a restrictive environment because it is a separate setting school for students diagnosed with emotional disturbance. Findings suggested that teachers who felt more in control were more likely to score higher on the ADTP-O, indicating a more positive attitude towards persons with disabilities. These results highlight the need for professional development within districts specifically relating to improving teacher efficacy.

Keywords: personal experience, staff, students with special needs, emotional disturbance

Acknowledgements

I would like to first acknowledge my mother, family, friends, and faculty who have supported me through this journey. To my mother, thank you for always being my number one fan through every experience, every “I can’t do this” moment, and every other stressful idea I have ever had. Your support has pushed me to this point and I could not be more grateful for the things you have taught me and pushed me to accomplish.

To my family, you have supported me through this process and made it seem like I have always been a rockstar. Although I have never shown it this support has meant so much to me and made me continue on my journey.

To my friends, you guys are awesome and have always been so understanding and supportive of my wild aspirations. Your desire to be great educators and continue your own education inspires me to be better.

To the CSUCI faculty that have pushed me through not only this program but previous programs, THANK YOU! Michelle, for being my rock on campus, pushing me, guiding me through the politics and stress, I don’t know what I would have done without you. You have advocated for so many students and your aura and positive but realistic attitude has allowed me to grow as an educator and as a student. Your passion shines through and I would not have wanted to walk this program path with anyone else. Tiina, you have such a passion for special populations and at-risk students. You have given me the background knowledge on law and continuing legislature which has allowed me to lead others, support families, and feel confident in special education rules and regulations. The resources you provide are endless and I am grateful to have had you through both programs I have attended at CSUCI.

Table of Contents

Abstract	3
Acknowledgements	4
List of Tables	7
List of Figures	8
Chapter One: Introduction	9
What is Emotional Disturbance?	11
Statement of Problem	16
Purpose of Study	17
Definitions	18
Limitations of the Study	18
Theoretical Framework	19
Chapter Two: Literature Review	20
Student Teacher Relationships	20
Teacher Self-Efficacy	24
Separate Setting Schools	25
Chapter Three: Methods	29
Procedures	29
Participants	30
Measures	31
Analysis	32

Chapter Four: Results..... 33

 High Group..... 33

 Low Group.....36

Chapter Five: Discussion..... 41

 Conclusions..... 44

References..... 47

Appendix A: Personal and Professional Experiences Questionnaire..... 52

Appendix B: ADTP-O Scale..... 53

Appendix C: Adult Consent Form.....55

List of Tables

Table 1: Demographic Statistics 31

Table 2: Low Group Experiences 38

Table 3: High Group Experiences 35

Table 4: High Group V Low Group ATDP Scores36

List of Figures

Figure 1: Type of Outside Relationship to Disability 40

Figure 2: Type of Negative Behavior Experience at Work 40

Figure 3: Type of Positive Behavior Experience at Work 41

Chapter One

Introduction

This study used a mixed methods design to measure the attitudes that school personnel have towards students with emotional disturbance (ED). The focus was on identifying levels of positive attitudes by staff working with students diagnosed with ED in a restrictive educational setting. Some students with a special education eligibility of ED present with emotional and behavioral challenges that interfere with their ability to access educational opportunities on mainstream campuses, either in general education or self contained settings. For some students with ED, the most appropriate educational placement is on a special education school campus. Restrictive or separate setting are defined as school sites that are outside of the comprehensive campus and are operated by another entity outside of the regular school district. These school typically have smaller class sizes, highly trained staff, and additional resources such as mental health services. These settings have been found to provide the one of the highest levels of behavioral modification and implementation of strategies associated with ED and are often designed to enhance the abilities of students to be more engaged, receive a higher level of support and have a high to staff to student ratio (Evans, Weiss, & Cullinan, 2012).

For the purpose of this study the focus school, Phoenix School, was chosen based on its specific design to serve students with ED. This school is operated by the Ventura County Office of Education (VCOE) which provide special education services and specialized programs for students K-22. Behaviors and strategies associated with ED instruction and support and a description of the school setting will be discussed further in this introduction chapter. All students served by Phoenix School are eligible under the special education category of emotional

disturbance and therefore have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). An IEP is a legal document which outline specific needs, goals, and other requirements for students educational needs. These needs can include a variety of therapeutic services, educational placements, behavioral guidelines, and plans for future educational needs. For the purpose of this study participants were recruited from a separate setting school which is specifically designed to serve children with emotional and behavioral challenges that interfere with their access to learning in a mainstream, comprehensive campus, environment.

Separate setting school sites that are specifically designed to serve students with ED are able to provide specialized care for students. These types of schools tend to value the small achievements in a students academic or social emotional growth versus the more socially idealized values and expectations (Crawford, Olds, Lisciandro, Jaceglav, Westacott, & Osenieks, 2018). For example, this type of setting may praise and reinforce a students attending school, or completing an assignment depending on baseline behavior in their previous academic setting. Another key aspect to a separate settings school are the high staff to student ratios, all staff are trained in Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS), and are also trained in using physical restraint in a safe way to manage student behavior when it becomes dangerous for the students or others. The staff in these setting tend to also follow some kind of campus wide positive support plan such as CHAMPS, a classroom based program for setting expectations for students and promoting structure and connectedness. Separate schools are also able to provide more 1-1 instruction, mental health services, and in the moment intervention not available in the mainstream setting.

They are also unique by their educational beliefs and practices, therefore, this research was designed to focus on the attitudes towards students in a restrictive educational setting focused on serving those with ED. Advantages and disadvantages of these restrictive school settings will be discussed in the literature review. Also to be discussed is how staff attrition, leaving the profession, and the need for consistent staffing and positive relationships can affect student learning and emotional engagement. Attrition, leaving the profession, can have strong negative impact on student learning due to the need for consistency and trusting relationships in the school setting (Billingsley, 2004). Although there is a plethora of research regarding student attitude based on school staff or school culture, there seems to be a gap in literature exploring the effects of staff's experiences both professional and personal on their attitudes towards their student population.

What is Emotional Disturbance?

According to IDEA Emotional Disturbance can be defined as:

“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. Inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors, b. Inability to build or maintain personal relationships with peers or teachers, c. inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances, d. General pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression, and e. Tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.” (IDEA, 2004)

This definition can encompass a variety of diagnoses, and such behaviors manifest in a many different ways. Students eligible for special education services under the ED category can have a variety of needs such as assistance with mental health diagnoses, speech and language needs, housing and basic living needs, and comorbid special education eligibilities, which is why it is important to identify some of the research driven strategies associated with these students

and then delve further into individual needs within an educators classroom. A student with ED eligibility may exhibit several types of behaviors. Common behaviors associated with ED include aggression, hyperactivity, withdrawal, immaturity, and inability to regulate emotional responses (Council for Exceptional Children, 2018). These behaviors can interfere with learning and due to great variability in diagnosis and behavioral endorsement, identification of appropriate educational placement must be determined on an individual basis. However, there are some similarities in strategies that can be used universally (Center for Parent Information Resources, 2017).

Previous studies, such as Ingram, et. al (2005) and Allday (2018), have also shown that students with ED typically respond to classroom environments that are highly structured and support a level of predictability. In a structured environment that has functional routines and established procedures the consistency reduces anxiety in students because they know what is expected of them. Both Ingram, et. al (2005) and Allday (2018) express the idea of reinforcement plans being highly predictable and engages students in a known pattern of reward or consequence. When students have a level of control and predictability they have been shown to be better prepared for learning (Evans, Weiss, & Cullinan, 2012). Garcia Dubon, (2018) also advocates for expanding learning opportunities for students by using schoolwide and classroom wide structure in order to provide stable and consistent patterns in the school setting.

Strategies for ED In the Classroom:

There are several studies focusing on strategies for students with ED. For example, Evans, Weiss, & Cullinan (2012) noted that two particularly successful strategies for students with ED were verbal reinforcements, and teacher proximity to the student. Reinforcements are

any item or action that are used immediately after students display desired behaviors to increase the likelihood of the behavior occurring again. It is also important to recognize that reinforcement for targeted behavior must be done immediately after the desired behavior occurs. Reinforcements can be physical, verbal, or tangible. Verbal reinforcement can range from “good job” to specific positive task feedback. During verbal reinforcement students may not always want specific praise, as this may be embarrassing, but rather to be recognized as a part of a productive group (Evans, Weiss, & Cullinan, 2012). Another evidence based strategy is teacher proximity which can be defined as the physical and emotional distance from the student (Eldar, Ayvazo, & Hirschmann, 2018). Many children with emotional disturbance have a history of trauma which in turn creates a sense of distrust in many adults around them. Building trusting relationships with these students becomes a vital asset to their learning process. This is because when students and teacher have strong positive interactions and relationships the environment promotes and increases the ability to learn (Pianta, 2017). By being aware of proximity teachers can both learn the boundaries of their students and begin to build relationships that are trusting and safe (Evans, Weiss, & Cullinan, 2012). Teacher proximity is an extension of the student teacher relationship which can be essential to students well being. Evans, Weiss and Cullinan also found that when staff begin building relationships with students they must begin with a wider proximity from the student.

In support of Evans, Weiss and Cullinan, an article by Brinkworth, McIntyre, & Gehlbach (2018) describes a variety of benefits to positive teacher student relationships. They also describe the idea that there is a focus on attachment theory which describes how relationships alter the abilities of adolescents to manage conflict, socialization, and the need for control. As the

relationship grows and becomes more trusting the students will indicate their level of comfort with staffs proximity and eventually the distance both emotionally and physically that is allowed with become less. The closer a staff can be to a student with ED the more effective their words become and the level of compliance and support for that student will increase. Clark and Lemay (2010), also support these idea with their work on social psychological theory focusing on perceptions and interactions as the defining components for developing teacher student relationships. Further research about student teacher relationships will be discussed in the literature review.

Phoenix School:

Phoenix School is a specially designed school to provide special education services for students who are receiving special education services under the Emotional Disturbance eligibility. Comorbidity is common and diagnosis include ADHD, Bipolar disorder, depression, etc. Each student is serviced by their Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and receive individual therapy services through Ventura County Behavioral Health (VCBH). At the time of the study Phoenix operated at three different campuses located in Ventura County, two in Camarillo and one in Moorpark. Each site serves students with Emotional Disturbance, with Los Nogales serving K-5 (3 classrooms), Moorpark serving K-8 (2 classrooms), and Airport serving both grades 6th-8th (3 classrooms) and 9th-12th (6 classrooms). Phoenix Airport is the focus of this study, and is considered a restrictive environment. Phoenix operates under the Ventura County Office of Education, as a public school, and serves students from all areas of the county based on referrals from the home districts. These referrals are assessed based on need and timing of receipt, reviewed by a case conference team including the home district representatives, Phoenix

team members, and VCBH representatives. After case conferences are held Phoenix holds case management meeting to reject or accept students based on the information provided to them at the case conference and in the referral packet provided by home district.

If students are accepted, an IEP meeting is scheduled to discuss the placement options and meet with the family. After discussion with the family and all other team members during the IEP, the team can make a decision on the least restrictive setting for the proposed student and identify if Phoenix is an appropriate fit for the students needs, at that time a plan will be devised for the child to be moved to Phoenix School. All students at Phoenix receive individualized counseling services, social work services, and counseling and guidance services as part of their enrollment in the program. Any additional services within special education are also provided on a case by case basis. Community resources are utilized within the campus such as Casa Pacificas Therapeutic Behavioral Services (TBS) which provides a youth partner and home resources for students who are either returning from a residential placement or are at risk of going to a residential treatment center (RTC). Another locally provided service for students is Collaborative Educational Services (COEDS) which provides several levels of services to families and students who may need additional behavioral intervention or social skill training. Services provided by COEDS can include a youth partner to work specifically with the student, a parent partner to support and guide the parents of the students, and a family case manager to monitor progress of the family, set goals, and provide additional resources and supports to the team. Phoenix also provides speech and language, occupational therapy, and offers opportunities for the high school students to participate in vocational courses through the Career Education Center.

Statement of Problem

Special education teachers and staff have a higher rate of attrition in comparison to their general education counterparts, with 50% of all teachers leaving the profession within the first five years of their career (IRIS Center, 2019). Factors related to high attrition include (a), teachers with families are more likely to leave special education due to the workload and overwhelming stress associated with their classrooms, and (b), teachers reported feeling a lack of leadership and support to navigate ongoing changes to expectations for their students and themselves on their campuses (Billingsley, 2004 & Brownell, Bishop, & Sindelar, 2018). In support of Billingsley (2004), an additional study conducted, specifically with staff of students with emotional disorders, indicated that administrative support, access to appropriate curricula, and lack of knowledge about emotional disorders or mental health disorders were major contributing factors to attrition (Cancio, Albrecht, & Johns, 2014). Cancio, Albrecht, and John's work also indicated that when frustration levels of staff increase the desire to maintain their relationships with students decreases and their overall attitude becomes more negative regarding the classroom and inadvertently the students. Since separate setting schools encounter such unique student population it can be inferred that it takes unique staff to support such a school. With attrition rates in special education already high, finding and maintaining staff who can support high needs students can be difficult. Staff who are supporting students with ED are required to have a skill set that with proper training would allow them to understand and utilize strategies specific to the diagnosis. In addition, students with ED often have comorbid diagnoses such as Bipolar, Attention Deficit Hyper Disorder, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and a variety of other possibilities which all require additional supports which staff must receive proper training on.

Lastly, as mentioned previously research has shown that student teacher relationships play an important role in the experience students have while in educational settings, having positive and ongoing relationships can be essential to a students success (Lai, et. al, 2015), and maintenance of the staff who support them. In exploring these relationships it is important to ensure an overall picture of the participant viewpoint, for this reason the measures are expressed as binary. An example of this type of measurement was explained in Brinkworth, McIntyre, & Gehlbach (2018) in which they recognized that when identifying attitudes or perceptions of those involved in teacher student relationships it was important to include all factors that could possibly contribute to their connotation.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore possible factors that contribute to staff attitudes towards students with the eligibility of Emotional Disturbance, and to identify factors that are related to a positive campus climate and culture. Identifying staff perceptions of their own weaknesses and strengths will help to gain insight into how staff feelings and experiences impact attitudes towards children. All staff who enter a school campus come with different backgrounds and prior experiences, which may affect the attitude they have towards the work they do, on the attitudes towards children, and on the way they interpret situations with students. The focus of this study is to examine the attitudes and experiences of school personnel who work in a self contained special education school specifically designed to educate students with ED. In pursuit of this focus two questions emerged as considerations for further examination:

1. Is there a connection between personal experiences of special education staff and their attitudes towards special education students?

2. To what extent are demographic characteristics associated with staff attitudes towards special education students?

By answering the above mentioned school administration may be able to assist in creating a more positive school culture and promote positive staff-student relationships.

Definitions

For the purpose of this study the follows terms are defined as:

- Attitude: staff feelings towards students with ED
- High Group: any score 75 or above on the ATDP-O scale based on median score
- Low Group: any score below 75 on the ATDP-O scale based on median score
- Self-Efficacy: a staff members perception of their own ability to be successful in a given situation
- Staff-student relationships: the positive or negative association that students have with their staff members, specifically related to their ability to feel safe in their school environment, and increasing the self-efficacy of the staff
- Separate Setting Schools: any setting not within a comprehensive campus, still considered a public school

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of this study are as follows:

- Researchers relationship to participants, PI is a teacher at the selected school and therefore has personal and professional relationships with many participants in the sample population

- Generalization: due to the unique setting results may not be able to be generalized to all special education staff or settings
- Knowledge of Incidents, the PI had knowledge of some of the incidents described and therefore could identify participants in their responses despite anonymity

Theoretical Framework

Articles and measures created for this research were based upon the ideas of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). American psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner developed a theory related to children and their growth/development as a in a series of systems. Each system includes different aspects of the child's life in levels from the individual outward. In what Bronfenbrenner describes as the "microsystem" this theory explores the most immediate and smallest environment to the child, typically including home, school, community, etc. The daily school environment falls within the microsystem and would be indicated as the environment for this study, however, we must also consider the next system, the mesosystem, and understand the idea that these systems interact with each other causing the child to make connections between environments. These systems show very clear reciprocal relationships, the microsystem partly being the direct relationships between school and the individual child. It can be inferred because these relationships are reciprocal that the impact can be detrimental to student learning and growth. Other theories such as Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969) and Social Psychological Theory (Baron, Byre, Suls, 1989). were considered, however, these theories did not contribute to the interactive and reciprocal relationships that this research was attempting to explore. Although both of these theories do identify with specific aspects of the microsystem they do encompass all the pieces as a whole consideration. Only by

combining the two theories do you end at Bronfenbrenner's theory with all aspects being included into the microsystem including conflict, parents socialization, and patterns of interactions within the home and school. With these connections, this study aimed to explore staff attitudes towards students with ED. Based on student teacher relationship literature, staff attitudes should bear weight on a child's overall development.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Student Teacher Relationships

Research has shown student teacher relationships influence child development. For example, Lai, et. al, (2015) examined students feelings of preparedness when graduating or transitioning back to a comprehensive campus, and the extent to which these students perceived the experience as a waste of time or as a character building experience. It was found students were more likely to recall interactions that were negatively based with staff and suggested that these perceptions regarding their school experience were long lasting in their connotation of educational settings. These results suggest that teacher relationships with students do affect the students overall attitudes towards school environment. This would also suggest that if more positive interactions between staff and students occurred the results would alter to reflect a positive attitude towards education settings.

Weiner and Higgins (2016) examined the connection between student and teacher cultures, and how these cultures relate to student's emotional engagement. Emotional engagement describes students feelings of safety, community, and relationship with staff and teachers in their environment. Findings indicated that time was the key factor to encouraging

high levels of emotional engagement and a collectively strong school culture. Throughout the three years of participation in the study students and staff reported an increase as the time progressed to their final year together as a unit in their emotional engagement with each other and the campus as a whole. As relationships were built around the campus between peers, staff, and familiarity with the campus there was an increase in student culture, more positive, and teacher culture, also positive. The goal is to create an understanding of both individual emotional engagement leading to interdependent emotional engagement. This interdependent emotional engagement is the collective culture of the school and that also continued to grow to be more positive as time continued.

Similar to Weiner and Higgins, Shernoff and Vandell (2007) examined the impact of adult interactions with youth in afterschool programs. Findings indicated that when doing art activities, sports, and academic enrichment activities, students reported higher levels of engagement and enjoyment when the activities involved both peers and adults, opposed to only peer interactions. These findings highlight the importance of high quality adult to child interactions on student engagement. In addition to after-school programs, previous research in early childhood settings support the idea that adults are an essential aspect to improving educational experiences for students with special needs (Kishida & Kemp, 2009). Kishida & Kemp (2009) examined the engagement of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), taking into account the extent to which adults were involved in academic tasks, or extracurricular activities. Finding indicated that there was a significantly higher level of satisfaction with the engagement when adults were involved.

There is also evidence for the ability to reframe students perceptions of their own learning experiences. A study by Kudliskis (2014), focused on the idea of, using pre and post intervention assessment, embedded linguistic strategies with special needs students and examined the change in their perception of the educational experience. Embedded linguistics are specific strategies and methods to speaking and using language to change the connotations of various topics. By changing the way staff and students speak and interact verbally there is a possibility of change in perception of school. Although the scores failed to be statistically significant for change in experience, other aspects of the study showed that specific linguistics techniques could provide benefits in further research for students with special needs (Kudliskis, 2014).

The findings from Kudliskis (2014) provided evidence that professional development appears to be an important aspect to creating a more positive attitude towards students with special needs. There is an established evidence base indicating that adult interactions are influential in the experience of students across several settings, on an independent level, however, part of that is ensuring that students are positively interacting with their staff. Kulo (2012), used experimental design to examine staff training and improvement. This study worked with a small group of special education staff and did a comparative review of two groups. One group was provided targeted training for working with students who receive special education services while the other group did not receive any training. They found that lack of background knowledge about evidence based practices to utilize with special education students decreased teachers efficacy and often times resulted in negative attitudes towards the students. When comparing the trained group against the non-trained group, researchers found that staff who were

trained on techniques to use with students with special needs had more positive attitudes and were more accepting, understanding, while promoting academic growth in the general education classroom. Other studies done by Ahmad (2016), Butler (2017) and Conderman (2013) all emphasized staff involvement in students experience of their education but these results were limited to individual students and were not able to be generalized to a community of students. Many of these studies concluded that further analysis was needed to explore the effect of staff on whole groups of students and the idea that staff come into their workplaces with preset ideals on students with special needs.

Emotional Disturbance falls into the category of settings where teacher-student relationships are critical to the students success or failure in the school setting. Students with ED present with a unique set of emotional and behavioral patterns that put them at risk for negative teacher relationships; this makes the need for dedicated and positive staff even more important (Lind, Poppin, & Murray, 2017). Lind, Poppin, & Murray (2017) also describes that student teacher relationship are contributed to by students ability to have strong self-determination and goal settings skills, they also explain that students with ED do not exhibit strengths in these areas and must be explicitly taught to begin and maintain these skills. Furthermore, understanding the emotional and behavioral characteristics of ED, as well as knowing when and how to use appropriate evidence based strategies within the realm of special education must be identified prior to focusing on adjusting the relationships already in place.

Teacher Self-Efficacy

Teacher efficacy is a teachers ability to produce desired or intended results during difficult situations. Strong teacher efficacy is accompanied by experience working in the field,

meaning a staff who has worked for several years dealing with stressful situations and may have a high comfort level for dealing with difficult behaviors exhibited by students in both academic and social situations. These skills can only be gained by having first hand experiences and learning to adjust based on student needs which increases the teacher efficacy. Previous studies have indicated that there is also an effect on teachers persistence during these situations (Almog & Schechtman, 2007). Also indicated was the idea that teachers with higher efficacy are more likely to use more positive interventions and reinforcements while those with lower efficacy are more like to be authoritative and use negative consequence or restrictions when dealing with the challenging behaviors (Brophy & McCaslin 1992; Jordan et al. 1993; Isabell & Szabo 2015).

One consistent finding across educational settings is that teachers tend to not feel prepared to manage both the emotional and learning needs of all children in their care (Gebbie, Ceglowski, Taylor, & Miels, 2012). Teachers in the study expressed high levels of stress, the need for more training and the hopes for the possibility of ways to share success stories with other teachers to boost the perception of positive impact (Gebbie, Ceglowski, Taylor, & Miels, 2012). This idea is maintained by Rotter (1966) which expressed that if teachers identify the positive impact they can have on students behavior and learning the level of efficacy increases. Thus, those with higher self-efficacy may have more positive attitudes towards the students they work with. This could also indicate that those who have a higher sense of self-efficacy have a higher feeling of control in challenging situations and when the learning environment does not operate as expected.

Separate Setting Schools

Special education settings have changed over time coming from a lineage of legislative modification and advocating for appropriate services from parents, political representative, and educators. These legislative changes include *Honig v. Doe* (1988) debating discipline within the school setting in regards to students with special needs, followed by the Hughes Bill (1990), which opened the discussion regarding appropriate services for students with behavioral needs (Disabilities Right Education & Defense Fund, 2003). Hughes Bill was repealed in 2013 and replaced by AB 86 which implemented the requirement for IEP's to be held when emergency interventions (physical restraint) are used on a child without an Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA). In 1997, the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) was revised including specific disciplinary regulations for students with special needs to create safe, fair and clearly outlined behavioral expectations for the given setting (National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities, 1998). Then PBIS was implemented in 2004 with the most recent revisions to IDEA with school settings of all types to focus on a school wide approach for reducing suspensions, preventing exclusions, and improving educational results (Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports, 2018).

As legislation continued to evolve so did the settings available to handle students with such behavioral needs that would comply with the least restrictive environment (LRE) where students could access their educational needs and have their behavioral needs addressed in the same capacity (Individuals with Disabilities Act, 2004). These placements can vary in type and in their ability or likelihood to provide behavioral modifications (Evans, Weiss, & Cullinan, 2012). Recognizing the differences in settings for students with emotional disturbance is

extremely important when considering the placement of these students and their individual needs. Separate setting schools do have advantages but there are some concerns associated with these settings as well. These concerns include: 1. Lack of support from district to return to general education campuses, 2. the sustainability of staff, and 3. the ability of staff to provide grade level or academic rigor. IDEA recognizes that students are to be placed in the least restrictive environment (LRE), meaning the environment in which they have the opportunity to thrive socially and academically.

With LRE always being kept in mind students, ideally, should move from separate settings back to district placements when they show the competencies and skills needed to adequately succeed. In order to gauge a students readiness to return school staff also consider the resources available in their district settings, whether it be SDC courses, mixed offering, or only resource. As the data collected is analyzed there is some conflicting information being provided about students that are placed at separate settings and those who are maintained in the comprehensive campus environment. According to Coutinho & Oswald (1996), studies provide compelling evidence that although there is a high amount of students that are being placed in separate setting schools, due to high level of behavioral or emotional regulation struggles, there is also evidence of an increase in students being placed in less restrictive settings such as resource or special day class (SDC) with lower level behavioral or emotional needs. However, another study suggested that this is not the case and that students who are placed at separate settings sites did not have a statistically significant difference in their behavior or academic performance (Lane, Wehby, Little, & Cooley, 2005).

With this information there must also be a consideration for setting itself and whether students who are placed in these settings are being benefited. Separate settings have unique features, strengths and possible issues in population but regardless they are settings which have unique needs and aspirations for the students they serve. These settings are considered essential assets to the continuum of school placements and can be a stepping stone for students success.

These settings have different expectations and can sometimes have goals which are very different from a comprehensive setting. If a student is placed inappropriately at a separate setting school there could be harmful effects on the student. Considering the staff perspective, there is also an argument for the idea that when students are inappropriately placed staff attitude, morale, and overall effect can be altered. When staff morale is low and students being placed based on inconsistent criteria there can be an effect on the sustainability of the staff both emotionally and physically at the school site. This effect on teachers and staff can also be translated to the general campuses who do not feel they receive the support necessary to provide the students they are serving.

Another widely discussed topic is the academic rigor from setting to setting. One study reports that students at separate setting schools, according to teacher reports, are highly deficient in their academic skills, the given assessments and curriculum based measurements show that the greatest area of deficit for these students is in social abilities (Siperstein, Wiley, & Forness, 2011). Although they did perform lower on academic tasks that area was not significant when comparing to those placed in comprehensive settings. Many students placed in separate setting schools require additional supports, both academically and emotionally, compared to students with ED in less restrictive settings. One area that was shown to not need adjustment, however,

was academic language. One study has found that “teacher talk” does not have to be reduced to students in these separate settings but rather restructured to fit the needs and desires of the students. (Hollo, & Wehby, 2017). Teachers do not have to change the content, rigor, or expectations but rather the way its being presented and the ability to utilize appropriate resources such as graphic organizers, note taking software, speech to text, etc. These changes can be easily accommodated in any environment.

One lasting effect often felt by separate setting students is the support from mental health services provided while attending these types of schools. That is one thing that has arisen as a comprehensive campus concern and has been shown as a need but not necessarily an urgency. Separate setting schools find that because mental health services are so beneficial to students they are necessary to provide these services at high levels of availability. Restrictive settings are designed to provide a higher level of care compared to that of a comprehensive campus. Staff at these school sites also are trained at high levels for social, academic, and emotional supports. Students with emotional disturbance can benefit from this as well as the staff being prepared and adequately trained for the struggles that appropriately placed students will exhibit. These emotional supports could be considered the more influential as students assigned to campuses for emotional regulation struggles typically will display behaviors that are stressful for all involved.

Maintaining staff development is essential to the effectiveness of these sites while understanding that the goals and aspirations for these students may look very different that those placed elsewhere. For these students it may be an accomplishment for the students to refrain from engaging in self-harm behavior, to graduate, to stay in one school for more than a year, to complete all assigned work, and so on. These schools have the staffing, professional

development, and mindsets to accommodate such needs as those encompassed in high behavioral need students.

This study is examining staff attitudes towards students with ED who are placed in a special education school. By examining acquired data the hope is to gain insight on how to assist the school develop more positive culture, attitudes, and increase the effectiveness of the learning environment by using student teacher relationships.

Chapter Three

Methods

Procedures

This study seeks to understand the perspectives of school personnel who work at a separate setting special education school specifically designed to meet the needs of students who are eligible for special education with an eligibility of ED. As such, participants were recruited from the Phoenix School, which is a special education school for students with ED, and Ventura County owned and operated by the Ventura County Office of Education. Adult participants were school personnel who worked at Phoenix school. They participated in a voluntary manner, with the promise of anonymity and confidentiality.

Detailed participant information will be discussed below. Each classroom of staff, including teachers, paraprofessionals, and behavior support personnel, were given a small presentation including the research purpose and participant roles in the study (length of time expected, examples of information being requested). At the end of each session individuals were reminded that the study is completely voluntary, confidential and anonymous. They were asked to complete a consent form if they were willing to participate in the study which they signed and

returned to researcher prior to receiving any portion of the questionnaire or survey. Each participant was sent an email via their professional accounts which welcomed them to the study and reviewed confidentiality and anonymity for the study. Two surveys were accessed by participants via a link embedded the email they received. These surveys were completed on participants own time, using personal devices, and on average consumed approximately fifteen to twenty minutes. Each participant was notified that there was a completion deadline two weeks from the distribution date and that several reminder emails would sent throughout that two week period.

Participants

Participants were chosen based on a convenience sample of the researcher and all participation was voluntary and anonymous. The sample used in this study comprised of twenty-one adults, out of a total population of 35 staff, all employed at a specially designed campus for students diagnosed with emotional disturbance in Ventura County. Participants had approximately one month to complete the surveys, with 52% (11 of 21) completing the survey within the first ten days of distribution. The job titles of participants varied and included teachers, paraeducators, and counselors. Participants completed a variety of demographic questions which were used to find patterns in the data set (Table 1). Of the twenty-one participants there were thirteen female (61.9%) and eight male (38.1%) all ranging in age from 18 to 40 years old. A majority of participants were forty years old or older (52.4%). Also reported was the amount of years worked at the school which revealed the largest group being those employed for more than ten years (33.3%) through Ventura County Office of Education (VCOE). The campus is broken into two grade levels of instruction, middle and high school,

therefore, part of the demographics identified five participants from the middle school (23.8%) and sixteen participants from the high school (76.2%).

Table 1: Demographics

	Gender		Years at Phoenix				Grade Level		Outside Relationship	
	Male	Female	0-3	4-6	7-9	10+	HS	MS	YES	NO
Total (21)	38%	62%	28.60%	23.80%	14.30%	33.30%	76.20%	23.80%	100.00%	0.00%
High Positive	5 (50%)	5 (50%)	1 (10%)	4 (40%)	2 (20%)	3 (30%)	8 (80%)	2 (20%)	8 (80%)	2 (20%)
Low positive	3 (30%)	7 (70%)	4 (40%)	1 (10%)	1 (10%)	4 (40%)	7 (70%)	3 (30%)	10 (100%)	0 (0%)

Measures

The Personal and Professional Experiences Questionnaire. This questionnaire asked questions associated with participants demographics, work experiences at the participants school site, connection to people with special needs outside of the school site, and their personal experiences with the special needs population. These questions gauged both positive and negative experiences and required participants to acknowledge thoughts or feelings of growth or change in their own attitudes based on those experiences. The questions were all open ended in nature and provided participants with an opportunity to openly express any situation they chose. Questions were specifically written to direct participants to consider professional experiences and personal experiences separately. Also included in the questionnaire were questions regarding previous exposure to persons with disabilities outside of the workplace and the relationship to the participant.

ATDP-O, Attitudes Towards Disabled Persons scale, Form O. The ATDP-O Scale was used to distinguish between groups of people that may unconsciously feel prejudice or low acceptance towards persons with disabilities. Form O is a alternative version of the scale using only twenty

questions opposed to the other two forms which use thirty questions. When given to a person with disabilities the scale shows the participants self-acceptance, as well as, their own acceptance to disabled community as a whole. However, for the purpose of this study the ATDP-O Scale was used to measure the acceptance of non-disabled persons to disabled persons. Each scale consisted of twenty questions and were answered much like a Likert Scale of positive and negative numerals (-3 to +3). There is an assumption that the scale provides a generalized outlook of opinion based on the reference group and not a specific person or diagnosis. Some questions in the scale were designed to be leading to the participants and therefore during scoring those answers were reversed in their positive or negative score value. During scoring if a participant did not answer or had a neutral response of three or more questions on the scale the results of that data were considered invalid and not scorable. The scores after all adjustments are made range from zero to one hundred and twenty, with higher values representing higher acceptance or attitude towards the disabled community. Higher scores also indicated the idea that the participant did not view a disabled person or the community as being very different from themselves.

Analysis

After participants completed all surveys they were examined using qualitative analysis. Answers to open ended questions were qualitatively coded and analyzed for salient themes. In line with mixed methods research methodology, in which qualitative data are collected and analyzed at the same time as quantitative data and results are compared to gain a more comprehensive picture of a phenomenon, ADTP-O scales were then scored based on the given responses by participants, higher scores are associated with a more positive attitude. Scores for

the ADTP-O ranged from 0-120 points and were used to find a median score and split participants into two sub groups, the high attitude group who received a score of 75 and above and low attitude group who scored below 75. Once participants were grouped by ADTP-O (attitude) score a frequency analysis was conducted to compare the qualitative themed data and demographic information of both groups. The comparative analysis revealed several overlapping ideas.

Chapter Four

Results

Based on analysis of the data several themes emerged from the qualitative data. Of the twenty one participants, twenty provided scorable ATDP-O scales. Within the set of twenty participants scored for this research the groups were divided into high and low attitude sets. Each group contained ten participants based on the average score of the whole data set.

High Group

The high group, meaning that this group had more positive feelings towards their students, consisted of ten participants ranging in ATDP-O scores from 75-96 points. When examining the demographic information the data showed that two of the ten participants were from the middle school (20%) while the other eight represented the high school (80%). The group was evenly split in terms of gender with five female and five male participants. Majority of the participants in this group were age 40 or older (50%) with those age 31-39 (40%) being the second highest age group. Data also showed that those who had worked in the population for 4-6 years (40%) represented the largest employment group and those with 10 or more years (30%) being the second highest.

These participants showed patterns in both the negative and positive experiences they have had while working in a specialized academic setting and within their personal lives (Figure 2 & 3). The high group displayed a focus on student success, which was defined as hearing students recognize their own success based on the program, watching change and success in the school, filling out college applications, and returning students reports of improved lives, being their most positive experience in the workplace. Student success represented responses from seven of the ten (70%) participants in this group. For example, one staff member stated:

“Just seeing how proud he was of himself, and hearing him say that he wouldn't have ever graduated high school if he hadn't gone to Phoenix and met so many people who helped him see that he could have a better life, was music to my ears. I like to think that we make a difference in our students' lives, but it feels good to have a student validate that. The negatives usually outweigh the positives, so it's easy to focus on those. Former, successful, thankful students make everything worthwhile!”

Participants in the high groups were also more likely to have a higher sense of control during difficult situations. The high group described a desire for understanding of students especially as the student behaviors most frequently discussed were related to physical aggression, which can be defined as throwing furniture, hitting, attempting to hit, and posturing, as being their most difficult experience with students (Table 3). One participant explained their experience, “The most difficult situation I've ever been a part of with a student would be when there was a student trying to attack and harm me physically. The student ran after me when I was leaving a classroom. Threw a punch in my direction. That student did not connect.” Among the

participants in the high group a higher frequency of using NCPI (Non-Crisis Prevention and Intervention) training, specifically using team restraints was reported.

Table 3: High Group Experiences

Participant ID#	ATDP	Type of Neg.	Type of Pos.
#18	75	PHYSICAL AGG. (NCPI)	STUDENT COLLEGE SEARCH
#3	82	THREATENED TO KILL, PHY.AGG. (NCPI)	SUCCESS OF THE STUDENT/GRAD.
#10	82	VERBAL AGG.	BEING THANKED
#2	84	WORK REF.	CARING FOR OTHER STUDENTS
#6	84	PHYSICAL AGG.	data not reported
#15	86	PHYSICAL AGG.	STUDENT SUCCESS
#21	91	PHYSICAL AGG. (NCPI)	STUDENT SUCCESS
#14	92	PHYSICAL AGG (NCPI)	BEING THANKED BREAKING THROUGH TO TOUGH
#9	93	SIB	KIDS
#20	96	WORK REF.	STUDENT SUCCESS

Eighty percent of participants in the high group also displayed a clear indication that their personal experiences have affected their attitudes towards their students. Participants were also asked to indicate why they felt this, with 70% responding that their dealing with special needs in their personal lives motivated them to be more understanding and considerate of the population. Eighty percent reported an outside relationship with a person with special needs. The responses varied from family members (70%), neighbors (0%), or friends (20%) (Figure 1). These results also reflect overlapping relationships, for example two participants indicated having both familial and friendships outside of the work place with a person who has special needs. The high group also indicated that 60% of participants felt that their perceptions have changed since working in a specialized academic setting. The change had a positive impact and data indicates that the high group had an overall better understanding about behavioral characteristics of disability working in the specialized academic setting. One participant expressed:

“Well, it's not so much the students change, we as people change in this field. We get set in our societal Norms, and the special education field is so much different. You have to have patience with this job. I've changed a lot in this field.”

Another participant displayed a more in-depth perspective of special education by providing the mental health component represented at the site, expressing the specific everyday struggles students experience and the effect on staff:

“I have a much better understanding of how trauma/abuse/neglect can impact the brain so it helps me to understand the best way to handle maladaptive behavior. I have also learned not to take behavior personally.”

Figure 4: High Group V. Low Group

Participant #	ATDP Score	GRADE	YRS AT PHX	AGE	GENDER
#17	38	HS	0-3	40+	F
#16	41	MS	0-3	40+	F
#5	50	HS	0-3	19-20	M
#1	51	HS	10+	40+	M
#11	53	HS	10+	40+	F
#13	57	MS	10+	31-39	F
#7	61	HS	7-9	31-39	M
#4	67	MS	4-6	21-30	F
#19	70	HS	0-3	21-30	F
#12	71	HS	10+	40+	F
#18	75	MS	7-9	31-39	M
#3	82	HS	4-6	40+	F
#10	82	HS	4-6	31-39	F
#2	84	HS	0-3	31-39	M
#6	84	HS	7-9	40+	M
#15	86	HS	10+	40+	M
#21	91	MS	4-6	21-30	F
#14	92	HS	10+	40+	M
#9	93	HS	4-6	31-39	F
#20	96	HS	10+	40+	F

*Low group indicated by scores 38-71, High group indicated by score 75-96

Low Group

The low group consisted of ten participants ranging in ATDP-O scores from 38-71 points. Demographic data was also analyzed for the low group and showed that 70% were employed in

the high school and 30% were employed in the middle school. Low group participants also had varying age group represented and 50% of the group were 40 years or older. Participants age groups 31-39 (20%) and 21-30 (20%) were second in the representation. For years of employment with the company the data was split with the two largest groups being 0-3 years (40%) and 10 or more years (40%) of employment.

These participants, much like the high group, showed patterns in both the negative and positive experiences they have had while working in a specialized academic setting and within their personal lives (Table 2). The low group displayed a need for being appreciated or thanked as being their most common positive experience with students (Figure 2 & 3). For example, one participant stated the reasoning behind their most positive experience, "I believe that because she said it in front of the entire school. Not a lot of people have the courage to speak in front of a large crowd. She wanted to let me know that I was doing a good job.". Another participant stated,

"The most positive experience that I have ever had was when a student thanked me for everything that I had done for him and told me that I had had a positive impact on his life. He said that my positive and supportive attitude was the reason that he came to school every day and that I was the first person in his life to ever care about him enough to stick around even when he was behaving poorly."

Low group participants also described the need for control, or they expressed feelings of not having control in difficult situations. For example, one participant described their reasoning behind their difficult experience as, "I have a general want to help these students and work hard to be friendly and supportive at all times, to everyone. It was difficult for someone to feel

negatively about me, and there being nothing I could do to change it.” In addition one participant stated, “It was tough because really did want to do bodily harm to me, & there was nothing that could change his mind. Just knowing that one of your students would truly want to harm you, even kill you over such a little thing, it makes you feel sad for them....”.

Table 2: Low Group Experiences

Participant ID#	ATDP SCORE	TYPE OF NEG.	TYPE OF POS.
#17	38	NO CONTROL PHYSICAL AGG. TOWARDS EACH	FEELING SUCCESS
#16	41	OTHER(NCPI) PHYSICAL AGG. TOWARDS EACH OTHER	BREAKING THROUGH TO TOUGH KIDS
#5	50	(NCPI)	AVOIDING PHYSICAL <u>AGG.</u> /PROBATION
#1	51	SIB	FEELING OF SUCCESS
#11	53	NO CONTROL	BEING APPRECIATED
#13	57	SEXUAL COMMENTS	STUDENT SUCCESS/BEING THANKED STUDENT <u>SAYING</u> THEY ARE THANKFUL FOR THEM SPECIFICALLY
#7	61	PHYSICAL/VERB AGG.	ASKED TO BE THEIR STUDENS PARENT
#4	67	PHYSICAL/VERB AGG.	BEING APPRECIATED
#19	70	NO CONTROL/VERBAL AGG	STUDENT SUCCESS
#12	71	IEP'S	

All participants in the low group reported having some kind of personal relationship with a person in the special needs community (Figure 1). These responses were represented by family (60%), friends (50%), and neighbors (20%), accounting for overlapping responses by several participants. Similar to the high group, 80% of participants reported that they felt a connection between their personal experiences and their attitudes towards individuals with disabilities. They also reported feeling empathy and patience for the population. Data also revealed that participants in the low group had a higher frequency of attitude change based on their working in the specialized setting with 80% responding “yes”. They described the change to be positive and that the work provided a more open minded and reflective mindset than previously had. One participant specifically states “The scale and variety of disabilities and how they manifest in

different individuals has made me more patient and reflective of each student's needs.”. Another member of the low group states, “Having hands-on experience in my own classroom. Learning from other staff, learning from the students”.

Those who indicated there had been no change in attitude, since beginning their employment, did not provide justification for their responses, and therefore are not represented in the examples.

There were no patterns of significant differences identified during the analysis of demographic information. However, qualitative data provided identifiable patterns in both groups surrounding their level of positive attitude and in their needs and motivations about student with ED. The high group indicated a need for students to be successful and that although physical aggression stands out as a negative behavior they are cognisant that the behavior has a communicative function. The high group also reported higher use of their NCPI training indicating a feeling of control in the situation and strong self-efficacy. In comparison, the low group indicated a need for recognition of their work and a need for feelings of control in difficult situations, low self-efficacy. This group also recognized that physical aggression was the most negative experience but these participants did not indicate the use of NCPI and instead reported leaving the area or calling additional staff to support the situation. This lack of action could be contributed to by the low self-efficacy and could explain the lower attitude scores.

Figure 1:

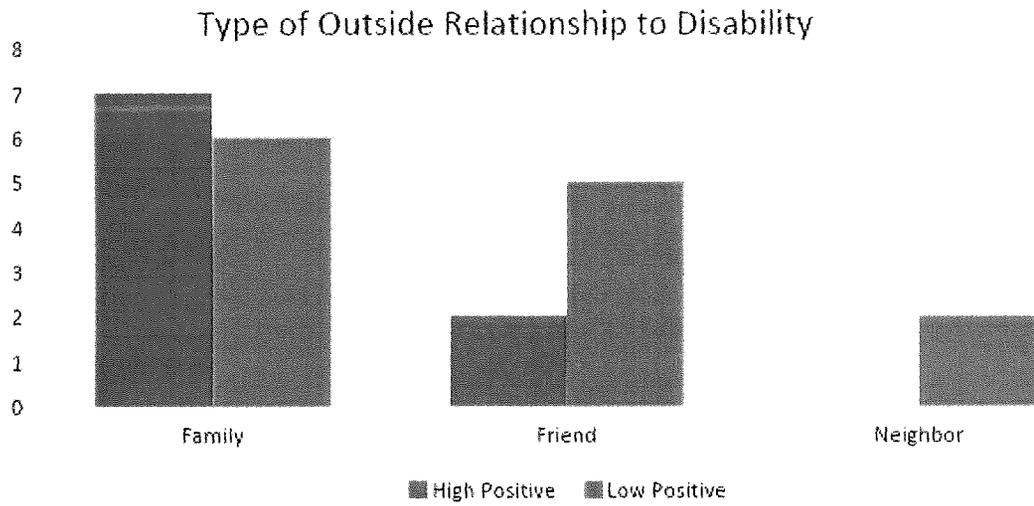


Figure 2:

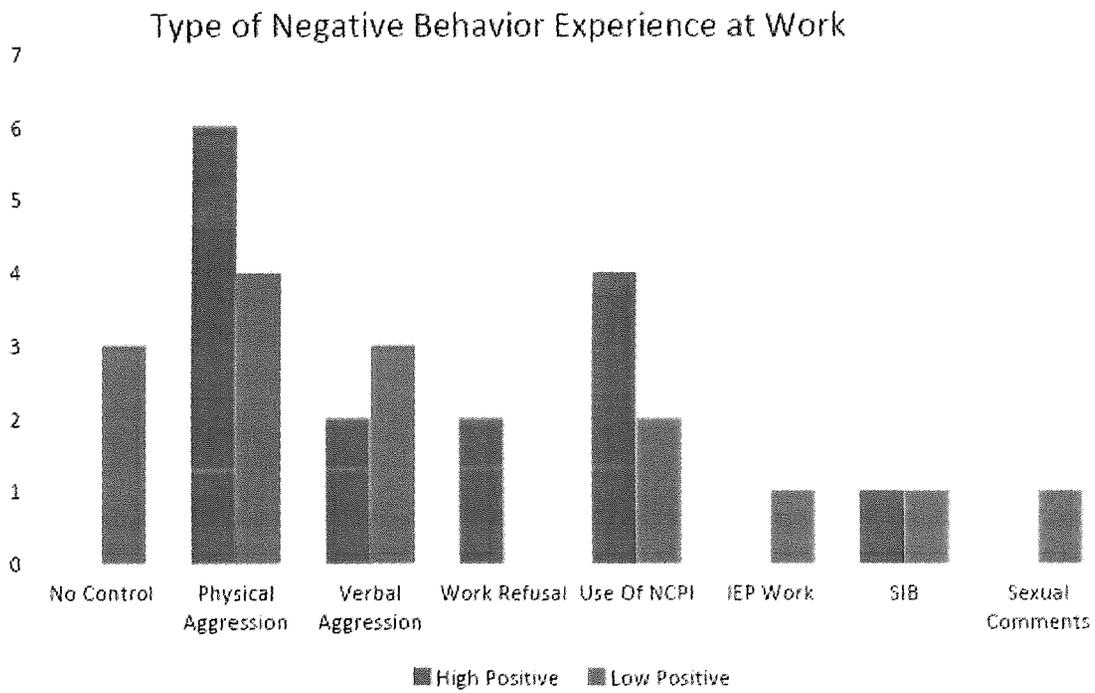
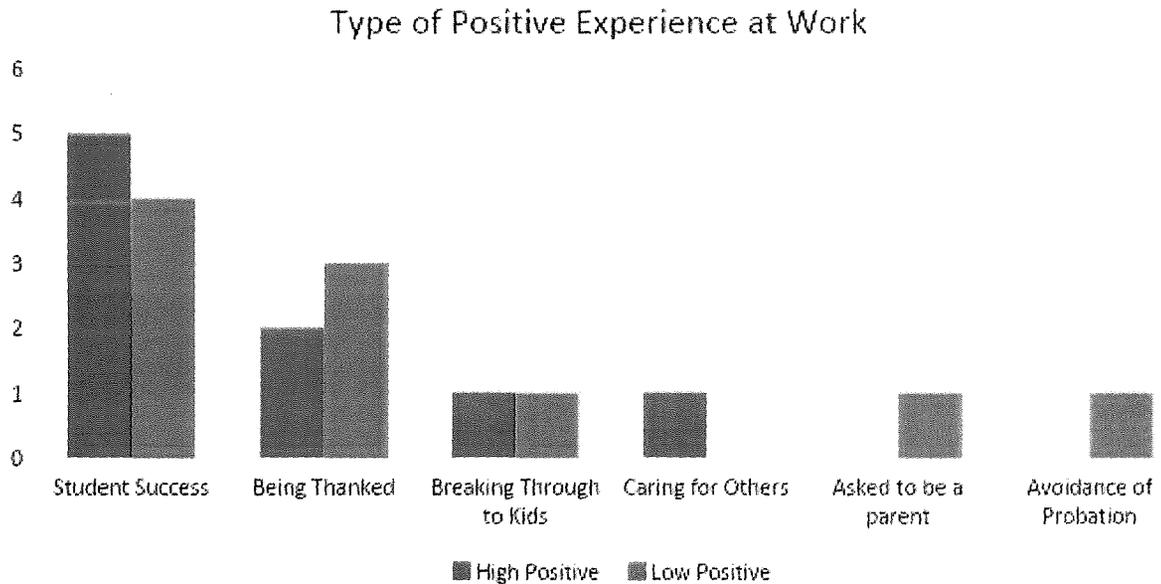


Figure 3:



Chapter Five

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions and attitudes of school personnel towards students with ED, who are educated in a restrictive special education setting. Research findings highlighted several salient themes (a) staff with high attitude scores feel more in control and are focused on understanding students to help push them towards success, and (b) staff with lower attitude scores feel a need for more support, lack of control, and are focused on their own personal recognition. Within the explored educational setting there are two areas that may need further exploration for the improvement of the site and employee wellbeing. First,

participants qualitative data identified many similarities between groups within the current population.

School personnel with more positive attitudes towards students with ED seemed to gain professional satisfaction when given evidence of student success as shown in their responses to survey questions. These participants may benefit from working in a school climate that promotes consistent student reinforcement for small and large accomplishments. They may also benefit from a school program which implements follow-up protocols with previous students. This could be an attempt from administration to contact recent graduates one year after leaving the school to check in on progress. The responses support that the staff in this group recognize the purpose in their work is for students to accomplish goals, even if those goals are not necessarily recognized by the societal norms for their age group.

This group also recognizes the behavior, even aggressive behavior, serves as a form of communication. Plow, Bottrell, & Te Riele (2017) provides support to the idea that success outcomes for alternative placements have a different meaning and different level of expectation. These outcomes are the substance to what these schools do as a unit and become more than just getting students through school but truly managing to improve quality of life and offer opportunities for future success (Plows, Bottrell, & Te Riele, 2017). The current study corroborates this research by emphasizing the need for school personnel to understand the needs of students with ED and to be able to set and uphold realistic and attainable expectations for these students. The idea of success should be individualized for each student. A benefit of these specialized settings is that this more restrictive environment is better able to provide wraparound supports to optimize the learning environment for these students. Despite more descriptions of

aggressive behaviors, the high group, demonstrated a better understanding of the communicative intent of these behaviors. Training provided to all staff on campus include verbal de-escalation techniques which are to be used prior to any type of physical intervention. These techniques allow for staff to build rapport with students and are intended to inform students of alternative options to the behavior and plan for next steps. When students are unwilling to utilize these strategies and pose a threat of harm to themselves or others an NCPI restraint can be used. Staff who are understanding of communicative functions of the behavior will be better prepared to handle high stress situations, use NCPI, and grow in their self-efficacy based on the experience.

The low group tended to seek a sense of control, and to receive acknowledgement from their students as evidenced by survey response describing being thanked as their most positive experiences and students requesting personal connection, such as being a parent to them. Staff who feel the need for control or validation may need additional team building activities or more frequent reminders of what the staff are contributing to the site to continue to build positive attitude. One study supports the idea that staff could benefit from more acknowledgement for the “emotional labour” that is endured by working not only in education but especially with challenging populations (Crawford, N., Olds, A., Lisciandro, J., Jaceglav, M., Westacott, M., & Osenieks, L., 2018). Emotional labour provides for building staff resiliency and promoting a higher staff morale and positive attitude, which is highly student centered.

The low group also expressed that, as a negative experience, physical aggression as well as sexualized comments to staff were particularly difficult. Keeping all of this in mind further research could be beneficial to find what staff are most affected by their personal

experience, high group versus low group, as well as investigate school climate and the perception of students on their school environment and their staff's attitude.

To promote self efficacy and reduce staff feeling they have no control, staff development continues to be an area that could be a valuable resources to school campuses nationwide but in particular for sites who needs additional evidence based practices for students with ED. Brock and Carter (2015) mentioned in their own literature review that paraprofessionals receive very low levels of training to be equipped to deal with students. Considering this factor they also address the idea that without proper training staff working in the field are less likely to affect student learning overall (Giangreco, Suter, & Doyle, 2010). Brock and Carter (2013) also describes that it has been proven that training is extremely beneficial to staff in building efficacy but also in increasing the student teacher relationship. Student teacher relationships, as mentioned previously, is essential to the learning environment. Also previously discussed was the idea that staff do not feel they receive adequate diagnosis specific training to help them build independence and efficacy while also increasing learning and support for their students. Training could include PBIS, diagnosis specific targeted training, update mental health training, etc. These trainings would be best implemented on an annual basis for frequently displayed diagnoses and as needed targeted training for unique scenarios, such as dissociative identity disorder, etc. PBIS should be a annual or biannual refresher for all staff on campus.

Conclusions

The research suggests that there is a connection between personal experiences of special education staff and their attitudes towards special education students. Based on the data collected it would appear that there is a connection between staff attitudes and their personal experiences

both inside and outside of work. Almost all staff represented in the sample group, it was interesting that the two participants who did not have personal connection to special needs populations both maintained a more positive attitude. It is also notable that although all staff are trained in NCPI, those who have actually used their NCPI restraint training showed a higher level of positive attitude towards the population. Thus having and utilizing training made participants feel more efficacious in their practice. Moreover, these individuals seemed to feel more in control during high crisis situations. These professionals have expressed a more in depth desire to understand that students.

With those finding it would reasonable to conclude that when staff have adequate exposure, training, and are able to use the training they are given they appear to have a higher positive attitude towards the populations they serve. In contrast, individuals with less positive attitudes towards their students showed characteristics of needing more gratitude and an overall desire for control. If research was to be conducted to further explore these results, a suggestion would be for a interview of participants to explore upbringing, or other possible life events which could have brought them to the perception they have now. Further analysis should be done to compare these results to their ATDP-O scoring and see if there are any significant patterns. Future research should also explore more factors in the professional environment that facilitate feelings of efficacy.

Demographic data showed some areas of further interest but did not have significant patterns that would be able to definitively link an association between individual characteristics and attitude towards students. The groups each had ten participants in them, the high group with equal gender ratio and the low group with 70% women and 30% men being represented. Both

attitude groups had some patterns which could be further explored in future research in the age groupings and the years of employment of participants. The high group had half of their sample age 40+ and four of the ten (40%) representing those who have worked for VCOE for 4-6 years. However, the low group showed also had half of their sample age 40+ with the years of service being split between the most service (10+ years) and the least amount of service (0-3 years).

Future research may explore the connection between lower positive attitude of staff during their first three years of service and after ten plus years of service. It is possible that staff who are new and those who have been in the field for many years have lower attitudes scores due to amount of experience.

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Appendix A

The Personal and Professional Experiences Questionnaire

Demographic Information:

Gender?

Male

Female

Which age group do you fall in?

18-20

21-30

31-39

40+

How many years have you worked for VCOE?

0-3

4-6

7-9

10+

What age group do you currently work with?

Middle School

High School

Survey Questions:

Let's begin by thinking about situations you have experienced with students in your work setting:

1. Describe, in as much detail as you can recall, the most **difficult** experience you've had with a student in your work setting.
2. What in particular made this experience difficult for you?

Now think about the positive experiences:

3. Describe, in as much detail as you can recall, the most **positive** experience you've had with a student in your work setting.
4. What in particular made this experience positive for you?

Let's now discuss a more personal perspective:

5. **Outside** of your professional career have you had experiences with persons with special needs? (yes, no, not sure)
6. If yes please indicate the relationship to that person(s). (family member, neighbor, other)
7. If yes, please indicate whether those experiences were positive or negative. (Check box)
8. Do you feel your **personal experiences** have affected your feeling or attitudes towards the students you currently work with?
9. If so in what way?
10. Do you feel your **attitudes** have changed regarding special education students from beginning your career at VCOE to now?

11. If yes why?

Appendix B

Attitudes Toward Disabled Persons (ATDP)

—Adapted from the Attitudes Toward Disabled Persons (ATDP) Scale,
Form O, by Yuker, Block & Young, 1970

Mark each statement in the left margin according to how much you agree or disagree with it. Please mark every one. Use the following numbers to indicate how you feel in each case:

+3 = I agree very much -1 = I disagree a little

+2 = I agree pretty much -2 = I disagree pretty much

+1 = I agree a little -3 = I disagree very much

_____ 1. Parents of children with disabilities should be less strict than other parents.

_____ 2. Persons with physical disabilities are just as intelligent as nondisabled ones.

_____ 3. People with disabilities are usually easier to get along with than other people.

_____ 4. Most people with disabilities feel sorry for themselves.

_____ 5. People with disabilities are often the same as anyone else.

_____ 6. There should not be special schools for children with disabilities.

_____ 7. It would be best for persons with disabilities to live and work in special communities.

_____ 8. It is up to the government to take care of persons with disabilities.

_____ 9. Most people with disabilities worry a great deal.

_____ 10. People with disabilities should not be expected to meet the same standards as people without disabilities.

_____ 11. People with disabilities are as happy as people without disabilities.

_____ 12. People with severe disabilities are no harder to get along with than

those with minor disabilities.

_____ 13. It is almost impossible for a person with a disability to lead a normal life.

_____ 14. You should not expect too much from people with disabilities.

_____ 15. People with disabilities tend to keep to themselves much of the time.

_____ 16. People with disabilities are more easily upset than people without disabilities.

_____ 17. People with disabilities cannot have a normal social life.

_____ 18. Most people with disabilities feel that they are not as good as other people.

_____ 19. You have to be careful what you say when you are with people with disabilities.

_____ 20. People with disabilities are often grouchy.

Appendix C

Informed Consent for Staff

Special Education Staff: Is there an association between personal experiences and attitudes towards special education students?

You are invited to participate in a study focused on the association of personal experiences of special education staff and their attitudes towards special education students being conducted by Tabitha Beairsto of CSU Channel Islands. We will also examine whether demographics are associated with the attitudes reported. We hope to learn about how attitude can be affected by personal experiences outside of the professional setting, and if there are any significant patterns in regard to demographic factors.

If you decide to participate, we will be requesting that you participate by completing two items. The first is an online survey discussing your personal experiences, outside of your professional setting, and, experiences you have had while working at Phoenix School. Unless you should choose to include your name, it will not be requested nor obtained in any way. Secondly, as a participant in this study you will be asked to complete a scale intended to examine attitudes towards children with special needs. This scale will need to include at least initials to connect it to your survey information. Please ensure both documents have your initials prior to returning to the researcher.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. If you give us your permission by signing this document, we plan to use this information to discuss the effect of working in a separate setting school and the associations between personal experiences of special education staff and attitude of special education students. The information regarding personal experiences and attitude will remain confidential; no names will be used in reports, or shared with your employer. No identifying information such as your name will be used if any results are disseminated in publications or at professional conferences. In these circumstances, each student will be assigned a numerical code or pseudonym and be referred to only by their code or pseudonym. All data will be kept in a locked filing cabinet, and will be destroyed after five years.

There is minimal risk associated with this study. Although some questions may elicit an emotional response, participants may choose to skip any questions they feel are overwhelming or uncomfortable to answer, with no consequence to you.

Your decision whether to participate will not prejudice your future relations with CSU Channel Islands, or Ventura County Office of Education: Phoenix School. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice.

If you have any questions, please ask me. I can be reached at 805-437-8009
tabitha.beairsto304@myci.csuci.edu or 805-512-3389.

I AM MAKING A DECISION WHETHER OR NOT TO PARTICIPATE. MY SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT I HAVE DECIDED TO PARTICIPATE HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED ABOVE.

Signature of Participant

Date

Questions or problems about your rights in this research project can be directed to Institutional Review Board at irb@csuci.edu or you may call 805-437-8495.

Signature of Investigator

Date

Questions or problems about your rights in this research project can be directed to Institutional Review Board at irb@csuci.edu or you may call 805-437-8495.