EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF PUBLIC K-12 GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS WITH RESEARCH-BASED FRAMEWORKS AND STRATEGIES FOR STUDENTS WITH AN EMOTIONAL DISABILITY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of public K-12 general education teachers with research-based frameworks and strategies for students in the classroom who are identified with emotional disability. The following questions were used to guide this study: (1) How do public K-12 general education teachers describe the use of research-based academic management frameworks and strategies in the general education classroom for students identified with an emotional disability? (2) How do public K-12 general education teachers describe the use of research-based classroom management frameworks and strategies in the general education classroom for students identified with an emotional disability? (3) How do public K-12 general education teachers describe the use of research-based student-teacher relationships frameworks and strategies in the general education classroom for students identified with an emotional disability?

Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data from the participants to better understand the central phenomenon. The findings of this study focused on the lived experiences of K-12 public general education teachers perspectives of research based frameworks and strategies for teaching students with an emotional disability. Three themes emerged from these coding of the interview transcript, these themes include, (1) Self-Identified Teaching Barriers, (2) The Importance of Knowing Students in their Environment, and (3) differentiation for students with an emotional disability.

Keywords: Academic Management, Classroom Management, Emotional Disability
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The history of special education laws within the educational system illustrates the educational journey for students with disabilities in public-school settings (Yell, 2019). Prior to 1975, there were many students with disabilities who were excluded from public education (Yell, 2019); the passing of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975 - S. 6), now called the Individuals with Disabilities Act (2004), shed light on the discrimination of children with disabilities who attended public school and did not receive and appropriate education (Yell, 2019). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) outlines the rights of all students with disabilities which includes the requirement of a free appropriate public education (FAPE) (American Psychology Association, 2022). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) allocates and directs federal funding to states used to support and educate students with disabilities (Yell, 2019). The IDEA (2004) is a federal statute that must be followed; however, in addition each state also has their own laws that may vary from state-to-state (IDEA, 2004). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) acknowledges entitlement of special education services and provides protection for all students with disabilities to receive appropriate education. The IDEA, (2004) also emphasizes special education and related services which are to be individually designed to meet the needs of every special education student in order to prepare these students for further education, employment, and independent living (Yell, 2019).

Free and appropriate education must be accessible to all students with disabilities between the ages of three to 21 (Section § 300.101 - Free appropriate public education (FAPE), IDEA, 2004). When a student aged three to 21 presents with a disability that can have an impact on their educational learning trajectory, they become entitled to an evaluation in any and all areas...
related to the disability (Yell, 2019). A student with a disability who is eligible for special education services is provided with an individual education plan (IEP) (IDEA, 2004). An IEP is an individualized education plan that lays out the special education instruction, supports, and services that a special education student needs to succeed in an academic environment (IDEA, 2004). Individualized education plans are part of PreK to 12 public education (IDEA, 2004).

A student becomes eligible for special education when a parent, school, or state agency requests an initial evaluation (IDEA, 2004). It is required by law that a determination of eligibility must be made within 60 days of consent for the evaluation (IDEA, 2004). Determining that the student has a learning disability is established through a comprehensive evaluation which can consist of (1) assessing a student’s ability by administering an intelligence test, (2) measuring a student’s level of achievement by administering standardized tests, classroom-based tests, or local assessments, (3) using a formula to compare the difference between the standardized testing scores of the evaluation conducted, (4) direct observations by the classroom teacher or related services, (5) parent and teacher rating scales, and/or (6) relevant medical information (IDEA, 2004). The IEP team reviews the evaluation findings and determines whether a student is eligible for special education services (IDEA, 2004). The IEP team typically consists of the parents of individuals with a disability, a regular education teacher, a special education teacher, and an individual who is qualified to interpret conducted evaluations; this is often the school psychologist (IDEA, 2004). Other individuals can be members of the team but are not required to be present (IDEA, 2004).

An Individual Education Plan is developed so that students can access their education at an appropriate level with appropriate accommodations and/or modifications needed for them to make progress on their IEP goals and objectives (Yell, 2019). While accommodations are
considered a change to help students overcome or work around their disability (i.e., alternate location for test taking, increase white space for assessments, preferential seating, etc.), modifications are changes to the content or grade specific curriculum (i.e., reading level) (Kurth et al., 2019). Present levels of academic achievement and functional performance are developed based on student performance and evaluations (Yell, 2019). Present levels of academic achievement and functional performance along with student strengths, parent concerns, and evaluation results drive the creation of goals and objectives of a student’s IEP (IDEA, 2004). Goals and objectives are measurable statements that describe what the student is expected to learn or focus on for the duration of the IEP (IDEA, 2004). The Individualized Education Plan is a document that enables the special education student to access their education at an appropriate level and be able to experience academic and behavioral success in an inclusive educational setting (Individuals with Disabilities Act, § 1412 (a)(5) of U.S., 2019). Students with disabilities should access their education in the mainstream classroom using the least restrictive environment (LRE) which is part of IDEA (2004). Least restrictive environment helps to prepare students with disabilities for the environments outside and beyond their educational environment (Yell, 2019).

Students who have been identified as having an emotional disability (ED) are increasingly attending mainstream classes with their peers (Brix et al., 2022) and are taught by both general education teachers and special education teachers (Brix et al., 2022). Emotional disability is a term that refers to a student who exhibits one or more of the following symptoms identified under the umbrella term, ED: difficulty building and maintaining interpersonal relationships, difficulty focusing and sustaining attention, anxiety, depression, oppositional defiance disorder, and obsessive-compulsive disorder (Behavior Disorder Symptoms, Causes and
Effects, 2019). Inclusion of students in the general education classroom identified as ED can be an adjustment for some educators who perceive teaching students identified with ED as difficult to have and teach (Gidlund, 2017). Research has demonstrated that for students with ED to be successful in mainstream classes, teachers need to use well thought out researched-based strategies with their students to set them up for success in the least restrictive environment (Garwood et al., 2020). Inclusion for students identified with ED creates a culture where all students can access and participate in academic content and social connections (Brix et al., 2022).

**Definition of Key Terms**

The following terms used in this study are defined as:

**Academic Engagement.** Academic engagement in a classroom is time spent engaged in assigned classroom tasks through activities such as reading, listening, and writing (Ennis et al., 2020).

**Accommodations.** Accommodations are implemented to help a student identified with a disability access their education without changing or modifying the curriculum content i.e., physical or environmental changes to their environment, use of assistive technology, etc. (IDEA, 2004).

**Eligibility.** Eligibility for special education occurs when an evaluation has been conducted and the results show that there is a need for specialized instruction. An evaluation is conducted by a team of professionals and is comprised of assessments, observations and rating scales completed by the parent, student, and school-based team (Wright & Wright, 2017).

**Emotional Disability (ED).** Emotional disability is a term that refers to a student who is identified as having ED could exhibit one or more of the symptoms identified under the umbrella...
term, ED: difficulty building and maintaining interpersonal relationships, difficulty focusing and sustaining attention, anxiety, depression, oppositional defiance disorder, and obsessive-compulsive disorder (Behavior Disorder Symptoms, Causes and Effects, 2019).

**Disengaged classroom.** A disengaged classroom is a classroom that experiences low attainment, underachievement and reduced sense of belonging (Duffy & Elwood, 2013).

**Inclusion.** Inclusion in education is addressing and responding to an academically and behaviorally diverse population of students. This can include modifying curriculum, adjusting teaching approaches and strategies, and encompasses a shared vision in educating students (Staler-Heer, 2019).

**Individuals with Disabilities Educational Act (IDEA, 2004).** IDEA was created and passed by the federal government to improve educational experiences for children with disabilities. It provides equality of opportunities and full participation of students with disabilities in the public-school setting for individuals ages three through 21 (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1400, 2004).

**Individual Education Plan (IEP).** Individualized Education Plans are developed for students identified with a disability to be able to access their education and make progress on areas identified by the IEP team. The IEP is a written legal document to provide a student the special education and related services that are specially designed to meet the unique needs of a student (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1400, 2004).

**Least Restrictive Environment.** Least restrictive environment is educating a student with a disability in the least restrictive environment possible. This provides students with a disability the opportunity to access their education alongside their non-disabled peers and help prepare them for life outside of their educational setting post education (Yell, 2019).
**Modifications.** Modifications are changes to the content of the curriculum being taught (IDEA, 2004). For example, if a student in fifth grade is reading at a third-grade level, all cross-curricular reading materials used for the student should be at a third-grade level.

**Relational Pedagogy.** Relational pedagogy refers to relationships, communication, and interactions between people (students/teachers). This type of pedagogy has the expectation that learners contribute to their own educational process and is a cultural shift for the classroom environment (Lyle, 2018).

**Special Education.** Special education is defined by the IDEA (2004) as specially designed instruction that is provided to all students with a disability at no additional cost to the student’s family and the purpose of special education is to meet the students’ educational needs (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1400, 2004).

**Statement of the Problem**

The problem explored through this phenomenological study is focused on identifying the research-based frameworks and strategies used in the general education classroom, to effectively educate students who are identified as having an emotional disability (Lanterman et al., 2021; Mitchell et al., 2019; Woodcock & Woolfson, 2019; Zarate & Maggin, 2021). The Individuals with Disabilities Educational Act (2004), requires and expects teachers to use research-based teaching frameworks and strategies when teaching all special education students, with or without ED (Zarate & Maggin, 2021). Students with emotional disabilities access their education from least restrictive environment which in most cases is the general education classroom. The IEP team determines what the least restrictive environment is (IDEA, 2004).

Academic management for teaching students with ED is a critical area of practice that has not been fully developed by large-scale research (Vannest, et al., 2011). This study provided a
thorough review of a variety of academic management frameworks and strategies that are used by general education teachers who teach and support students with ED (Bergsmann et al., 2015; Cook, 2017; Ennis, 2020; Griful-Freixenet et al., Hill & Jones, 2018; 2021; Lane et al., 2018; Morris et al., 2021; Rudenstine, et al., 2017). In addition, student-teacher relationship frameworks and strategies support the importance of positive relationships between students and their teachers (Johnston et al., 2022). Teacher expectations are associated with student academic achievement and by using prescribed student-teacher relationship frameworks and strategies in the classroom general education teachers can better support students with ED (Betttini, 2020; Bierman, 2021; Caldarella et al., 2019; Johnston et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2021; Morgan et al., 2015; Scanlon, 2020). Also, research-based classroom management frameworks and strategies such as Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) equip general education teachers with a framework to manage a classroom that blends both general education students with students identified with ED (Barns & McCalllops, 2019; Esen-Aygun et al., 2017; Gaias et al., 2019; Hunter 2017; McCormick 2015; Neth, et al., 2019). Supporting general education teachers through professional development opportunities to learn current frameworks and strategies when teaching students with ED should be readily available (Talida et al., 2019). Teacher resources, such as professional learning time (PLC) with colleagues, curricular planning and materials, school climate, paraprofessional support, and social resources are essential for teaching inclusion with students identified as having ED (Bettini, 2020; Davis & Cummings, 2021). Providing general education teachers time for collaboration with special education teachers (Berry, 2021) can help general education teachers teach students identified with ED (Bettini, 2020). With the many research-based frameworks and strategies available for teachers to implement, the need for quality training is substantial (Davis 2021; State et al., 2019).
**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of public K-12 general education teachers with research-based frameworks and strategies for students in the classroom who are identified with emotional disability. Exploring research-based frameworks and strategies that are being implemented in the mainstream classroom is important (Lanterman et al., 2021; Mitchell et al., 2019; Woodcock & Woolfson, 2019; Zarate & Maggin, 2021). This research provides descriptions of lived experiences of general education teachers’ use of research-based frameworks and strategies that may be implemented in a variety of academic settings for students with an emotional disability (Conroy et al., 2019). With the implementation of frameworks and strategies for students identified with ED, students and teachers may experience success in academic environments (Conroy et al., 2019). By examining the experiences of general education teachers who teach students identified with ED and examining the research-based frameworks and strategies they describe as using in mainstream classrooms, the researcher will focus on their lived experiences using data collected in semi structured interviews to gain a better understanding of the perceptions of the central phenomenon that this study focuses on.

**Research Questions and Design**

Research studies begin with an idea, interest, or concern that is developed into a research topic (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). An important piece of this research study is the development and refinement of the research questions which guide the researcher and become the center of the research design (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Research questions are directly tied to the purpose of the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). In qualitative studies research questions are developed at the beginning of the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018).
Research Questions

The research questions for this study were developed and narrowed down to specifically address the problem and purpose of this study. The following questions were used to guide this study:

**Research Question One:** How do public K-12 general education teachers describe the use of research-based academic management frameworks and strategies in the general education classroom for students identified with an emotional disability?

**Research Question Two:** How do public K-12 general education teachers describe the use of research-based classroom management frameworks and strategies in the general education classroom for students identified with an emotional disability?

**Research Question Three:** How do public K-12 general education teachers describe the use of research-based student-teacher relationships frameworks and strategies in the general education classroom for students identified with an emotional disability?

Research Design

This qualitative phenomenological study was designed to explore the lived experiences of general education teachers regarding the use of evidence-based frameworks and practices in the classroom for students identified with ED. The intent of this study was inductive; to generate ideas around the research topic being explored (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). Students identified with emotional disability are learning in the least restrictive environments which is most cases are the mainstream, general education classrooms aiding this phenomenon to naturally unfold within its typical element (Lantermann et al., 2021).

The procedure for conducting this phenomenological study included; (1) determining if the research topic is a sound researchable topic, (2) identifying the purpose and intent of the
study, (3) developing research questions that align with the phenomenological research being investigated, and (4) developing patterns and relationships of meaning throughout the research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). The researcher has determined that a qualitative phenomenological study was the most appropriate approach to this study. Using this approach the researcher was able to discover and understand the meaning of experiences, can be reflective about their own perspective, acknowledges personal values, and bring their own experiences on the study and continues to be actively involved throughout the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). The researcher will use a small sample which was selected purposefully, and the research took place in its natural environment using real-world situations which aligns with qualitative phenomenological studies (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018).

**Conceptual and Theoretical Framework**

The conceptual framework guides the researcher through the use of rigorous questions, concepts, beliefs, and theories (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). The positionality of the researcher plays an important role in the research (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). The researcher for this study drew from professional experiences as a special education teacher who supported students with individualized educational plans in the general education setting. The researcher's own lived experiences led her to understand that there may be a gap between the intent of research-based frameworks and strategies and the actual implementation of the research-based frameworks and strategies in the general education classroom. The topical research focuses on the work that the researcher was interested in and offered insight on the nature of the problem being studied (Hightower, 2014). The main problem of this study focused on identifying the research-based frameworks and strategies used by general education teachers, who teach students identified with
ED (Lantermann et al., 2021; Mitchell et al., 2019; Woodcock & Woolfson, 2019; Zarate & Maggin, 2021).

Fernando and Marikar (2017), stated that constructivist teaching and learning theory advocates a participatory approach in which students actively participate in the learning process. According to Fernando and Marikar (2017), the claims of constructivist teaching/learning theory are the following: 1) learning is an active experience, 2) the ideas students hold about the subject and topic being taught will form a part of their learning experience, and 3) learning is socially and culturally rooted. Constructivist teaching/learning theory acknowledges and builds on a foundation around the concept that teaching is not the transmitting of information instead it is the process of acquiring knowledge that builds upon prior knowledge or experiences (Fernando & Marikar, 2017). Constructive learning is where the teacher allows the students to develop and construct their own understanding of new information (Devi, 2019). Students who are identified with ED often reach stages of learning at a different pace than their peers and have many distractors that create barriers between themselves and their cognitive development (Mitchell et al., 2019). The constructivist teaching/learning theory directly relates the research-based frameworks and strategies that teachers use in their classroom to build foundational skills, scaffold new knowledge, and engage students in the learning process (Bergsmann et al., 2015; Cook, 2017; Ennis, 2020; Fernando & Marikar, 2017; Griful-Freixenet et al., Hill & Jones, 2018; 2021; Lane et al., 2018; Morris et al., 2021; Rudenstine, et al., 2017).

More specifically, this qualitative phenomenological study used the sociocultural theory of cognitive development as the theoretical framework used to address the central phenomenon. Vygotsky’s (1934) sociocultural theory of cognitive development views human development as a socially mediated process where children gain their cultural values, beliefs, and problem-solving
skills through dialogue with more knowledgeable people (McLeod, 1970). In Vygotsky’s theory (1930), he suggested that social experience shapes the way of thinking and interpreting the world. Jaramillo (1996) stated that Vygotsky supported that individual cognition occurs in social situations. Vygotsky (1934) developed three concepts within the sociocultural theory of cognitive development; culture-specific tools, private speech, and the Zone of Proximal Development (McLeod, 1970). Cultural development is a focus of Vygotsky’s theory in the development of mental abilities such as speech and reasoning in children (McLeod, 1970).

According to Vygotsky (1934), adults in society contribute to children’s cognitive development through meaningful conversations and activities. Meaningful conversations between adults and students can happen naturally in a learning environment, and there are frameworks that can be used to foster those conversations and interactions. Universal Design Learning (UDL) is a reached-based instructional framework that enables students to build and maintain relationships, exhibit appropriate behaviors, and demonstrate academic achievement (Cook, 2017). Adults show children what to think and how to process through natural interactions (Vygotsky, 1934).

Guided instruction is an effective teaching strategy that can be used for students identified as ED that focuses on natural interactions. (Morris et al., 2021). Guided instruction provides students with support when acquiring new knowledge and guides them through their thinking and processing of new content (Morris et al., 2021).

Interactions with others has a significant impact on the amount of knowledge acquired and the skills developed, according to Vygotsky (1934). The process of social and emotional learning (SEL) allows individuals to acquire the knowledge, skills, and develop an attitude to manage emotions, feel empathy for others, and achieve individual and collective goals (Fundamentals of SEL, 2021). Vygotsky (1934) proposed that children are born with mental
abilities such as memory and perceptions and as they encounter social situations with adults those abilities expand and they acquire more knowledge. While children may be born with abilities such as memory and perceptions (Vygotsky, 1934) social-emotional competencies taught within the social emotional learning curriculum have academic outcomes such as the increased ability to problem solve, critical thinking, attention skills, and behavioral regulation (McCormick, 2015). Vygotsky (1934) stated that language has two functions, inner speech and external speech. Inner speech is used for mental reasoning and external speech is used for communication though conversation with others (Vygotsky, 1934). The skill of reasoning and communication links to the social emotional learning framework, demonstrated through the increase of a student's ability to establish and maintain positive relationships, control emotions, and make responsible decisions (Billy & Garriguez, 2021). The Zone of Proximal Development was created by Vygotsky (1930’s) and shows the space or gap between what the learner already knows and what the learner can learn with adult support which accounts for learning potential of children (Schneuwly & Martin, 2022). Similarly, competency based education relies on empowering students' ownership over goals and learning while teachers identify student needs, gaps in their learning, and use data to intervene immediately to address student need (Patrick, 2021).

The researcher chose the sociocultural theory of development as the theoretical framework, because it aligns with many research-based frameworks and strategies that general education teachers can use in the classroom to teacher students identified with emotional disabilities. The frameworks and strategies that will be reviewed thoroughly in Chapter 2, incorporate the importance of student-teacher relationships and the dialogue that engages and fosters new knowledge (Bierman, 2021). The frameworks also highlighted the importance of
appropriate social interactions with peers and teachers that can increase academic engagement (Cook, 2017).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope

This section discusses the assumptions, limitations, and scope of this qualitative phenomenological research study. Assumptions are what the researcher believes to be true (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). The assumptions are based on certain premises that may either hold up or be shown to be unwarranted during the data analysis (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). Limitations identify potential weakness of a study and are external conditions that can restrict the study’s scope or outcome of the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). The scope refers to the parameters of the study set by the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Assumptions

Assumptions are statements that reflect what the researcher believes to be true (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). The assumptions developed for this study are reflected in the methodology chosen. A qualitative phenomenological approach was used for this study because the researcher felt as though exploring perceptions and lived experiences of general education teachers will address the central phenomenon being studied. Assumptions the researcher has identified based related to using a semi-structured interviews to collect data include that the researcher assumes that the public K-12 general teachers who will be interviewed understand the unique needs of a student who are identified as having an emotional disability, the researcher assumed that the responses from interviewing the general education teachers accurately reflect the participants professional opinions and understandings, and the researcher assumed the sample that was used for this study was a good representation of public K-12 general education teachers’ professional opinions and understandings.
Limitations

All research has limitations, the limitations can include the researchers’ assumptions, limitations of qualitative research, and limitations of design (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). Limitations are features of the study that may affect the results or the ability to generalize the findings (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). The limitations of this study stemmed from the methodology used (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenological approach requires interpretation of the data, it will inevitably result in the fusion of any assumptions that a researcher may bring to the table (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Another potential limitation of this method is that it requires skill in the art of interviewing to elicit authentic answers from participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

This study encompasses interviewees from a very specific demographic only reaching a view of educators from this location. The research presented in the review of relevant literature are the most current research-based frameworks and strategies, however, frameworks and strategies in education are constantly evolving. Frameworks and strategies can and will vary from student to student depending on the individual’s unique needs, deficits and strengths (Definition and Interpretation, n.d.). It is important for educators to identify which strategy or best practice align with the students’ unique needs and implement that strategy with fidelity (Definition and Interpretation, n.d.). Experiences can either be limited or different for educators within the school system for a variety of reasons (i.e., content specific educators, environmental ailments, location, etc.) (Evans et al., 2012).

Scope

The scope are the parameters set by the researcher of this study (Creswell & Poth, 2019). In this study the researcher planned to interview public K-12 general education teachers. The participants were recruited from the Connecticut Teachers Facebook Page. The scope of this
study only included eight public K-12 general education teachers who were members of this Facebook Page.

**Rationale and Significance**

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2018), the rationale for a study is the justification for the study presented as a logical argument. The rationale continues to describe the importance of the study and why it should be studied. The significance addresses the questions regarding the study and reaffirms the research purpose and provides details as to the implications of the study and the benefits that can derive from the study itself (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018).

**Rationale**

Although there has been extensive research on frameworks and strategies for teaching students with ED, exploring the lived experiences of general education teachers who teach students with ED in their general education classroom addressed the central phenomenon studied (Evans et al., 2012). It was important to know if general education teachers used the frameworks and strategies that are research-based for academic management and classroom management, and also to understand the teacher’s perceived effectiveness of the framework or strategy being used (Gaastra et al., 2022). Knowing if general education teachers used the research-based frameworks and strategies enabled the researcher to better understand the experiences the participants may have with students identified as ED in their classrooms. Additionally, it was important to know how general education teachers perceived the student-teacher relationship frameworks and strategies that they may use in the general education classroom (Gaastra et al., 2022). This provided the researcher with an understanding of the relationship between student and teacher through the implementation of a framework or strategy. It is important to know the shared experiences of general education teachers who work with students identified with ED.
Exploring the experiences of public K-12 general education teachers who work with students identified with ED allowed them to share their understandings of the phenomenon, and describe how they used frameworks and strategies in their classrooms.

**Significance**

This qualitative phenomenological study was important to the public K-12 general education teachers who participate with sharing their lived experiences with teaching students who are identified as ED. This study gave these teachers a voice and allowed them to share their perceptions of the central phenomenon through the interview process (Johnston, 2022). This study may also be important to other general education teachers who work with or might work with students identified as ED, as these shared lived experiences may provide an understanding of the lived experiences of their colleagues with the research-based frameworks and strategies used (McGuire & Meadan, 2022). Students identified with ED may spend the majority of their day with general education teachers, which makes the collaboration and understanding of lived experiences important (McGuire & Meadan, 2022). Special education departments may also value this study and the shared experiences of the general education teachers to better understand collaboration efforts to share frameworks and strategies for teaching students identified as ED (McGuire & Meadan, 2022). The findings of this study may also be important to school administration, as they can review some of the experiences of general education teachers as they described how they implemented frameworks and strategies for working with students identified as ED (McGuire & Meadan, 2022).

**Summary**

The problem explored through this phenomenological study was identifying the research-based frameworks and strategies that are used in the general education classroom to effectively
address students who are identified as having an emotional disability (Lanterman et al., 2021; Mitchell et al., 2019; Woodcock & Woolfson, 2019; Zarate & Maggin, 2021). The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of public K-12 general education teachers regarding the use of research-based frameworks and strategies for students in the classroom who are identified with emotional disability. Research questions for this study were developed and narrowed down to specifically address the problem and purpose of this study. There were three carefully crafted research questions that address; academic management, classroom management, and student-teacher relationships. The conceptual framework for this study included the research’s positionality drawn from professional experiences of working with students who have been identified with ED, as well as collaborating with general education teachers who work with students identified with ED. A constructivist approach was taken and the sociocultural theory of cognitive development was used as the theoretical framework to inform and guide the research alongside the carefully identified research questions.

The remainder of this study is organized into four chapters. Chapter 2 expands on the conceptual and theoretical framework, and provides a review of relevant literature. Chapter 3 provides a description of the methodology of the study. The methodology is presented and includes the site information, demographics, the participant and sampling methods used, data collection, and data analysis, limitations, delimitations, as well as ethical issues and trustworthiness of the study. Chapter 4 examines the results of the study, looking at the analysis method, and presents the results and findings. Chapter 5 concludes the research by providing an interpretation and importance of the findings, implications, recommendations for action, and recommendations for further study of this topic.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This study explored the perceptions of public K-12 general education teachers regarding the use of research-based frameworks and strategies for students in the classroom who are identified with an emotional disability (ED). There are three overarching themes outlined within the review of relevant literature: academic management, classroom management, and student-teacher relationships. Each of these frameworks and strategies increases behavioral and academic success for students with an emotional disability in the classroom (Caldarella et al., 2018). The literature review will also present the importance of targeted professional development that educators can then implement in their classrooms with the resources that they have available to them. Frameworks and strategies continue to be created and enhanced to better support students with emotional disabilities (Bettini et al., 2022). The review of the literature provides the most common effective strategies that teachers can implement within their classrooms to consistently support students who are labeled with ED. Additionally, this chapter will further describe the conceptual and theoretical frameworks of this study. This qualitative phenomenological study used the constructivist teaching and learning theory as part of the conceptual framework and the sociocultural theory of cognitive development is used as the theoretical framework.

There is a population of students who attend K-12 public schools who have been identified as having an emotional disability. A student who is identified as having an emotional disability could exhibit one or more of the symptoms identified under the umbrella term, ED which include difficulty building and maintaining interpersonal relationships, difficulty focusing and sustaining attention, anxiety, depression, oppositional defiance disorder, and obsessive-compulsive disorder (Behavior Disorder Symptoms, Causes and Effects, 2019). Students with ED can either internalize (e.g., depression, social withdrawal, anxiety, extreme inhibition) or
externalize (e.g., high activity, impulsivity, aggression, defiance) behaviors (Jordan et al., 2020). Students who are identified with ED can often present with complex needs within the academic environment (Jordan et al., 2020). Students who have been identified as ED are often categorized as difficult to teach (Metaxas, 2021). Educators often look to make changes to student schedules, behavior plans, when a problem is present for a student identified with an emotional disability (Metaxas, 2021). Researchers can look deeper into how teachers interact with students who are identified with an emotional disability (Metaxas, 2021).

Most students with ED are educated in general education classroom for most of their school day (Cook et al, 2017). Inclusion of all special education students in general education classrooms is the starting point for adhering to the least restrictive environment (Lim, 2019). Least restrictive environment can provide students with emotional disabilities the opportunity to be in mainstream classes which in turn may lead to an increased need for general education teachers to have additional training so that they can identify and apply effective strategies in their mainstream classes for students with ED (Lim, 2019). Evidence-based frameworks, practices and teacher training can better support students with emotional disabilities in the general education classroom (Lanterman et al., 2021). Students who have ED are often not available to learn academics a school setting without appropriate supports in place (Freeman et al., 2018), meaning that either their behavior or emotions interferes and disrupts their learning (Freeman et al., 2018).

**Conceptual and Theoretical Framework**

The conceptual and theoretical frameworks help to define and understand the researcher’s viewpoint and interests more acutely (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). The frameworks focus on the specific narrowed central phenomenon (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019) and the understanding of
research-based frameworks and strategies to be used in the classroom to effectively address students who are identified as having an emotional disability (Lanterman et al., 2021).

The conceptual framework can be described as a natural progression of the phenomenon being studied (Adom et al., 2018). It can be understood as the backbone or bridge that connects all the pieces of the research together. The conceptual framework guides the researcher, poses rigorous questions, concepts, beliefs, and theories (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). In this study, the researcher has established the importance of studying general education teachers’ experiences with using frameworks and strategies for teaching students identified as having emotional disability in the public K-12 school setting. Implementing research-based frameworks and strategies enables every student to have equal access to their education (Lanterman et al., 2021).

The researcher drew from professional experiences with teaching students who are identified as ED in the general education setting. The researcher, through their own lived experiences, led her to understand that there may be a gap between the intent of research based frameworks and strategies, and the implementation of those frameworks and strategies in the general education classroom. The topical research focused on the work that the researcher is interested in. The nature of the problem studied is brought to life through the main problem being studied: identifying the research-based frameworks and strategies used by general education teachers who teach students identified with ED (Lanterman et al., 2021; Mitchell et al., 2019; Woodcock & Woolfson, 2019; Zarate & Maggin, 2021).

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework is the part of a study that is based on existing researched theories. The theoretical framework influences the researcher’s decisions and research (Adom et al., 2018). The constructivist teaching/learning theory directly relates to the research-based
frameworks and strategies that teachers use in their classroom to build foundational skills, scaffold new knowledge, and engage students in the learning process (Bergsmann et al., 2015; Cook, 2017; Ennis, 2020; Fernando & Marikar, 2017; Griful-Freixenet et al., Hill & Jones, 2018; 2021; Lane et al., 2018; Morris et al., 2021; Rudenstine et al., 2017). Constructivist teaching/learning theory identifies a restriction of education that teachers cannot simply transmit knowledge to students, instead, students need to actively construct knowledge in their own minds (Bada & Olusegun, 2015). Constructivism considers students to be active learners while they discover and transform new knowledge (Bada & Olusegun, 2015). Constructivist believe that ideas a taught, however, students’ beliefs and attitudes play a large role in the acquisition of new knowledge (Bada & Olusegun, 2015). Constructivism is a learning theory found in psychology which explains how people might acquire knowledge and learn, and has a direct application to education (Bada & Olusegun, 2015). According to Fernando and Marikar (2017), the claims of constructivist teaching/learning theory are the following: 1) learning is an active experience, 2) the ideas students hold about the subject and topic being taught will form a part of their learning experience, and 3) learning is socially and culturally rooted.

More specifically, this qualitative phenomenological study used the sociocultural theory of cognitive development as the theoretical framework used to address the central phenomenon. The researcher chose this theoretical framework because it aligns with the academic and classroom management frameworks and strategies identified in this study as well as the frameworks and strategies for student-teacher relationships. Lev Vygotsky’s (1934), cognitive development theory has become the foundation of research and referred to often in particular his, sociocultural theory (McLeod, 2018). Vygotsky’s (1934) sociocultural theory states that children acquire their cultural values, beliefs, and problem-solving strategies through having the use of
language. Vygotsky’s (1934) theory is developed into three concepts which include culture-specific tools, private speech, and the Zone of Proximal Development.

**Culture Specific Tools**

Culture specific tools are described by Vygotsky (1934) as both real tools and symbolic tools which both play a large role in cognitive development. These tools that culture provide support higher level thinking such as reasoning and critical thinking. These tools and symbols are taught though day-to-day activities by adults (Vygotsky, 1934). Social interaction plays a significant role in the development of cognition (Vygotsky, 1978). Social and emotional teaching and learning (SEL) is a process where individuals can acquire the knowledge, skills, and an attitude to manage emotions, feel empathy for others, and achieve individual and collective goals (Fundamentals of SEL, 2021). When teachers use the social emotional learning framework it may increase social interaction between students and students and teachers (McCormick, 2015).

**Private Speech**

Private speech according to Vygotsky (1934), can be described as speaking aloud to oneself and is a phenomenon of child development that Vygotsky interpreted as a pivotal stage between speaking with others and thinking for oneself (Fergenbaum, 2020). There are research based frameworks and strategies used for teaching students identified with ED that rely heavily on speech and communication such as Universal Design Learning (UDL). Universal Design Learning is a reached-based instructional framework that enables students to build and maintain relationships, exhibit appropriate behaviors, and demonstrate academic achievement (Cook, 2017). Adults show children what to think and how to process through natural interactions (Vygotsky, 1934). Additionally, guided instruction is an effective teaching strategy that can be used for students identified as ED and that focuses on natural interactions (Morris et al., 2021).
Guided instruction provides students with support when acquiring new knowledge and guides them through their thinking and processing of new content (Morris et al., 2021). Vygotsky (1978) argued, "Learning is a necessary and universal aspect of the process of developing culturally organized, specifically human psychological function" (p. 90). Culturally responsive classroom is a researched based framework that focuses on how the teacher communicates with their students in a consistent way, how the teacher incorporates and accommodates the students’ culture and background, and how the teacher encourages engagement and participation of the student through the use of close, caring, and personal relationships (Gaias et al., 2019).

Zone of Proximal Development

The Zone of Proximal Development was created by Vygotsky (1934) and shows the space or gap between what the learner already knows and what the learner can learn with adult support which accounts for learning potential of children (Schneuwly & Martin, 2022). Vygotsky (1934) claims that students benefit directly from the social interactions in class, and ideally, reach their learning potential with the help of their teacher. Similarly, competency based education relies on empowering students’ ownership over goals and learning while teachers identify student needs, gaps in their learning, and use data to intervene immediately to address student need (Patrick, 2021).

Academic Management Frameworks and Strategies

A classroom instructional framework or strategy is only effective if the educator implements it with fidelity and full knowledge and understanding of the “why” and the “how” of the frameworks and strategies (Ennis et al., 2020). Providing general education teachers with authentic research-based professional development opportunities empowers educators to implement a framework or strategy with integrity to improve the functional relationship between
the strategy and student academic engagement (Ennis et al., 2020). Using effective research based instructional strategies increase academic and social engagement and avoids academic and social failure in the general education classroom (Ennis et al., 2020). Commonly used academic management frameworks and strategies that are included in this review of the literature include research are; Universal Design Learning, self-monitoring in UDL, explicit instructional strategy, differentiation instruction, instructional choice strategy, guided instruction, and competency based education strategy.

**Universal Design Learning**

Universal Design Learning (UDL) is a reached-based instructional framework that enables students to build and maintain relationships, exhibit appropriate behaviors, and demonstrate academic achievement (Cook, 2017). Universal Design Learning was developed by researchers Rose and Meyer (2002), and is based on years of neuroscience research (Carrington et al., 2020). The UDL framework has three guiding principles that guide educators to support all learners by providing multiple ways of engaging students, representing knowledge, and demonstrating understanding (Carrington et al., 2020). When teachers incorporate all three principles into their lesson planning this may enable students to understand a deeper connection between the academic lesson and real-life (Cook, 2017). Teachers should provide feedback at checkpoints throughout lessons with mastery as an end goal, and encouraging collaboration between peers and teachers to encompass coping and problem-solving skills into their work (Carrington et al., 2020). Additionally, when teachers provided relativity in their lessons it can increase student engagement and interest (Cook, 2017). Consistently providing constructive feedback to students with ED can help keep them on track with their learning so that the end goal of mastery is always in sight and attainable (Cook, 2017). Encouraging collaboration during lessons keeps students actively
engaged and communicating and allows teachers to continuously progress monitor (Cook, 2017). Universal Design Learning was designed specifically to help students succeed in various school settings including, special education, and general education classrooms (Carrington et al., 2020). If teachers can identify the potential threat for a student which makes them unavailable for academic learning in their classroom then, educators with the use the UDL can effectively reach students labeled with ED in the mainstream classrooms (Cook, 2017).

**Self-monitoring in Universal Design Learning**

Self-monitoring is an important piece of UDL for students labeled with having an ED (Cook et al., 2017). Self-monitoring as provided by UDL requires students to engage in self-assessments and self-record so that they are aware of their behaviors and can improve upon them with the use of scaffolding to build independence in managing their behavior (Cook et al., 2017). There are two types of self-monitoring: self-monitoring for attention and self-monitoring for academic progress (Lastrapes & Mooney, 2019). When students use self-monitoring for attention they are tracking a specific behavior (Lastrapes & Mooney, 2019). This can begin with the teacher giving a cue to the student that they need to track their attention, the student assesses if the target behavior is present at the time of the cue (Lastrapes & Mooney, 2019). The cue can be an agreed-upon gesture between the teacher and student that reminds them of a target behavior. With appropriate scaffolding, this cue can be fading support from the teacher and the student can learn to track independently (Cook et al., 2017). When students use self-monitoring for academic progress this monitors the amount of work completion or accuracy during the task. Self-monitoring for academic progress is only used when the academic task is attainable. Both of these self-monitoring techniques are intended to increase time on task and behavioral and academic performance in educational settings (Cook et al, 2017). Self-monitoring can
be an empowering strategy for a student with ED to take control and gain an understanding of their own learning and habits that could interfere with their learning (Lastrapes & Mooney, 2019).

**Explicit Instruction Strategy**

Explicit instruction is a research-supported method for teaching students with disabilities (Foxworth et al., 2022). It is highly engaging and is effective in closing the learning gap between general education and special education students (Morris et al., 2021). Within explicit instruction there are three main components: modeling the skill or behavior, guided practice, and checking for understanding (Morris et al., 2021). Explicit instruction is a very clear and detailed and is a closely monitored lesson between the student and teacher (Foxworth et al., 2022). This leaves no room for miscommunication or misunderstanding of the objective being taught for the student, and this method increases the success rate for the transfer of the academic material being taught. (Morris et al., 2021). Explicit instruction is student-center allowing them to explore and teacher directed allowing for meaningful academic outcomes for a diverse group of learners (Foxworth et al., 2022).

**Differentiated Instruction**

Differentiation instruction (DI) was originally founded by Tomlinson (1999), in effort to meet the needs of gifted students. The framework of differentiated instruction since then has expanded to become a whole class teaching approach when there was a realization that the student population has become much more academically diverse (Griful-Freixenet et al., 2021). Differentiated instruction may be considered a prerequisite for the inclusion of special education students in the general education classroom (Strogilos et al., 2020). General education teachers should expect to have diverse learning needs in their mainstream classrooms and plan instruction for students labeled with ED (Strogilos et al., 2020). Differentiated instruction has three core
principles: (1) differences in student readiness, which is the “what” in learning, (2) differences in learning profiles which is the “how” in learning, and (3) differences in student interest which is the “why” in learning (Griful-Freixenet et al., 2021). Differentiated instruction is possible in mainstream classes by utilizing flexible grouping (Tomlinson, 2017). Flexible grouping allows teachers to match students to tasks based on academic and social skill levels and differentiate the curricula using appropriate teaching materials and methods base student need (Tomlinson, 2017). Flexible grouping is done methodically to enhance student strengths and address their weaknesses (Tomlinson, 2017). Flexible grouping is not a stand-alone strategy of differentiated instruction, it needs to be used in conjunction with curriculum adaptations and teaching methods and materials (Griful-Freixenet et al., 2021).

Differentiated instruction does not mean that each student has a different assignment, it is taking the objective for the lesson and presenting it in a way that focuses on meaningful learning in the classrooms and ensures that students are engaged and produce powerful ideas (Tomlinson, 2017). Differentiation requires the teacher to be a more active participant within the classroom, and simultaneously allow for student’s to think and be independent learners (Tomlinson, 2017). When using the differentiated instructional framework, end of unit assessments are not commonly used, instead, a pre-assessment is given to appropriately group and lesson plan for students and then teachers continuously progress monitor throughout the unit (Tomlinson, 2017). A classroom that is being taught through differentiated instruction is engaging, relevant and interesting for all students (Strogilos et al., 2020). Teachers can use pre-assessments to pin point specific content that students are ready for (Tomlinson, 2017). Teachers can then integrate how the student can learn the material and have their “buy in” to their learning (Griful-Freixenet et
Buy-in is an important part of the process to be successful with differentiated teaching and learning (Griful-Freixenet et al., 2021).

**Instructional Choice Strategy**

Instructional choice is a low-intensity researched-based strategy that has been effective with students who are labeled as having ED (Ennis, 2020). There are multiple ways that effective teachers have incorporated instructional choice into their lesson planning; the student is presented with two or more tasks to choose from, the student is presented with a task and can choose who to initiate the task with, or the student is presented with multiple ways to initiate a single task (source). There has been research to prove that there is a functional relationship between the instructional strategy of student choice and academic engagement (Ennis, 2020). Allowing students to choose their instructional choice independently and then facilitating that choice is an important piece in fostering academic engagement in mainstream classrooms (Lane et al., 2018). Giving a student instructional choice needs to be a thought-out process and the teacher needs to be prepared to facilitate the choice chosen (Ennis, 2020). For educators, this method could appear to take more time, but with a well-managed classroom, time on task should increase (Lane et al., 2018). Instructional choice is a research-based strategy that increases time on task and behavior and has a positive impact on students with ED in the mainstream classroom (Lane et al., 2018). Instructional choice for elementary students can be during part of a lesson; reading a story or listening to a story, it could be physical placement; sitting on the carpet, at a desk, or using a wobble seat while reading or listening to the story. It could also be game choice during independent practice, there are many variables (Lane et al., 2018). For secondary students, instructional choice could be a creative way to complete a traditional assignment; creating an advertisement or book cover instead of writing a report. A pre-determined choice
board or menu is an effective way to offer instructional choices to students (Lane et al., 2018). Instructional choice can also be used for homework, which increases the completion rate, and assessments in which a student can better demonstrate their understanding of a topic (Lane et al., 2018).

**Guided Instruction**

Guided instruction is an effective teaching strategy that can be used for students identified with an ED (Morris et al., 2021). Sustained guided practice throughout lessons can help support students with ED and lead them to academic and behavioral success in the mainstream classroom (Morris et al., 2021). Practice is an integral strategy in education and more so for students with disabilities (Morris et al., 2021). Guided instruction provides the student with sufficient effective support that can be a faded support over time (Morris et al., 2021). While performing guided practice the teacher can model expectations and give prompts beginning with the lowest level of hierarchy prompting (gesturing) and increasing prompts as needed for the student to gain full access to the objective (Morris et al., 2021). Modeling can be a powerful strategy that reaches students labeled with an ED. Learning through observation provides the student with access to both visual and auditory opportunities, followed by trying the task themselves afterwards.

**Competency-based Education Strategy**

Competency based education allows students to move through their education based on their ability to master a skill or competency at their own pace (Patrick, 2021). Competency based education relies on empowering students’ ownership over goals and learning while teachers identify student needs, gaps in their learning, and use data to intervene immediately to address student need (Patrick, 2021). Additionally, competency based education is the strategy of
teaching, assessing, grading and reporting on students based on their ability to demonstrate specific skills set throughout their learning (Bergsmann et al., 2015). Competency based education can also be looked at through the lens of meeting a student where they are (Bergsmann et al., 2015). This means identifying where the student falls on the learning continuum and beginning the competency based education strategy from that point (Bergsmann et al., 2015). This can be a complex process but nonetheless an important process (Bergsmann et al., 2015).

There are three parts to meeting a student where they are: (1) identifying where a student falls academically, (2) identifying what learning target will help them move forward, and (3) identifying what the student needs (Rudenstine, et al., 2017). All students have a learning trajectory but not all students are at the same place on that trajectory (Rudenstine et al., 2017). If the teacher is able to understand where the student with ED falls within their own learning continuum they can then plan for academic, emotional, and behavioral forward progress (Rudenstine et al., 2017).

**Classroom Management Frameworks and Strategies**

Classroom management systems and frameworks can increase student success by creating an orderly learning environment that enhances students’ academic skills and competencies, as well as their behavioral and social emotional development (Bierman, 2021; Gaias et al., 2019; Hill & Jones, 2018; Rogers, 2019; Simonsen et al., 2022) Classroom management includes, organizing the physical environment, defining and teaching expectations for behavior, preventing minor conflicts from escalating into major confrontations, and communicating with families (Williams et al., 2022). Commonly used classroom management frameworks and strategies include Positive Behavior Intervention Support, social emotional learning, culturally responsive classroom, and repeat student-teacher matches.
Positive Behavior and Intervention Support

Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) is a widely adopted prevention framework for improving social, emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes for all students (Simonsen et al., 2022). Positive Behavior and Intervention Supports can be used to help establish classroom management in an inclusive general education classroom. A classroom that is well managed provides for an environment where students can be actively engaged and are more receptive to academic learning (Simonsen et al., 2022). Positive Behavior and Intervention Support can offer research-based strategies to teachers that have shown to be effective in mainstream classrooms with students who have ED (Hunter, 2017). An important part of using PBIS and having good classroom management is knowing your environment and who is in it (Hunter, 2017). When teachers know their students they can often predict behaviors beforehand and can potentially help avoid the behavior by implementing known strategies (Simonsen et al., 2022). Knowing your students and understanding their antecedents is the precursor to effective classroom management (Simonsen et al., 2022).

Positive Behavior and Intervention Support is a three-tiered intervention with tier one supports being available to the entire classroom (Hunter, 2017). These supports include teaching school-wide expectations and a reward system for meeting expectations and can be remembered as PPET: physical classroom, procedures and rules, explicit timing, and transition (Hunter, 2017). The physical setup of the classroom should be intentional and is a research-based strategy for minimizing disruptive behavior and maximizing the structure of the physical classroom (Kittelman et al., 2019). The teacher could think ahead to the layout of their room and when arranging furniture so that the teacher can easily move around the room for proximity control and minimize distractions for students (Kittelman et al., 2019). Being able to move seamlessly throughout the classroom allows teachers to actively supervise, engage with students, and is an effective teaching method (Simonsen et al., 2022).
Distractions for students might include being seated near windows or doors, decorations or posters, computers, or instructional materials (Hunter, 2017). For students labeled with having an ED, a high level of structure is typically needed that could simply look like desks in rows facing the front of the room (Hunter, 2017). Procedures and rules should be posted, taught, reviewed, and enforced within the mainstream classroom according to the PBIS framework. These clearly articulated procedures and rules can be presented to provide behavior supports for students to be successful behaviorally and academically (Hunter, 2017). Behavioral expectations are especially important for students with ED (Hunter, 2017). Explicit timing is the third component of the research-based effective PBIS management strategies (Kittelman et al., 2019). Explicit timing is the amount of allotted time for pieces of a lesson and it is an expectation for the teacher and class to move from one task to the next. This may help keep students’ attention while collaborating and moving forward with engagement to avoid potential behaviors (Hunter, 2017). Lastly, the transition from one location to the next either within the classroom or within the school is one of the common ways for teachers to lose instruction time, as teachers may lose 20% of their instructional time to transition (Hunter, 2017). Solid rules and procedures, timers, and a clear understanding of how long the actual transition from one activity or class to the next may help minimize unexpected behaviors during transition (Hunter, 2017).

**Social-Emotional Teaching and Learning**

Social-emotional teaching and learning can positively impact classroom management through the implementation of strategies and frameworks developed in the social emotional teaching and learning framework (Rogers, 2019). Social-emotional teaching and learning have had positive effects on students who have displayed emotional and behavioral difficulties (McCormick, 2015). Social and emotional learning (SEL) is a process where individuals can acquire the knowledge, skills, and an attitude to manage emotions, feel empathy for others, and
achieve individual and collective goals (Fundamentals of SEL, 2021). Some social-emotional competencies taught within social emotional learning curriculum have academic outcomes such as the increased ability to problem solve, critical thinking, attention skills, and behavioral regulation (McCormick, 2015). Effective social emotional learning programs that demonstrate student self-regulation and academic standings are taught by teachers who have received proper social emotional learning curriculum training (McCormick, 2015). While studies have shown that the effectiveness of teaching social emotional learning to students who have ED is promising, the concern lies with the translation of research to practice (Barns & McCallops, 2019). Teachers play a vital role with intervention and implementation of social emotional learning, and research has demonstrated that teachers can be effective implementers of social emotional learning (Barns & McCallops, 2019). The problem at hand can be either the lack of resources or lack of teacher training or a combination when it comes to implementation of social emotional learning (Barns & McCallops, 2019).

Social-emotional learning programs have clearly shown positive impacts on student behavior, academics, and classroom climate (McCormick et al., 2015). School-based social-emotional programs are designed as a preventative intervention strategy to enhance academic skills by building and supporting their social-emotional and behavioral skills (McCormick et al., 2015). Social-emotional learning is a crucial part of improving student outcomes (Neth et al., 2019). Social Emtional Learning plays a large role in students’ lives inside and outside of school (Rogers, 2019). The core competency skills that are learned can impact students across all settings of their lives. Social Emotional Learning effects self-recognition and self-acceptance (Neth et al., 2019). Social Emtional Learning programs are designed to help teachers improve their classroom management skills and relationships with their students as well as teach students important daily social skills (Rogers, 2019). The structure and
climate that the teacher set for the classroom can determine how successful a SEL student will be in that setting (Esen-Aygun et al., 2017). Teachers need opportunities to gain more knowledge around SEL so that they are able to implement effective classroom management as well as foster caring relationships with their students (Rogers, 2019). The response when teachers can offer both of these components in their classroom is positive and student-centered (Rogers, 2019). Students become more available to learning in settings where SEL is implemented with fidelity, students are more regulated which decreases behaviors and increases academic successes (Esen-Aygun et al., 2017).

In the 21st century, the implementation of social emotional teaching and learning has become essential (Esen-Aygun et al., 2017; Rogers, 2019; Fundamentals of SEL, 2021). Social emotional teaching and learning leads students to academic success and boosts their personal and social well-being (Neth et al., 2019). Self-regulation and anger management skills are necessary for student with ED to possess so that they can be successful in mainstream environments (Billy & Garriguez, 2021). Teachers need to be trained and have access to appropriate materials to be able to use SEL effectively where they have a class with students who are able to demonstrate mastery of self-regulation, sustained attention, is empathetic, academically successful, and emotionally available (Billy & Garriguez, 2021). Social Emotional Learning can be an effective tier one support system in place for all students to help with growth as an individual by being able to establish and maintain positive relationships, controlling emotions and making responsible decisions (Billy & Garriguez, 2021). When SEL is implemented with students who have ED with fidelity it can become an important structure of their day. Frequent daily check-ins with students with ED is a proactive strategy that can set them up for a successful behavioral and academic day (Billy & Garriguez, 2021).
Culturally Responsive Classroom

A culturally responsive managed classroom focuses on a few key factors including how the teacher establishes and enforces expectations in an equitable way, how the teacher communicates with their students in a consistent way, how the teacher incorporates and accommodates the students’ culture and background, and how the teacher encourages engagement and participation of the student through the use of close, caring, and personal relationships (Gaias et al., 2019). In a culturally responsive classroom, the teacher acknowledges and incorporates student background and identities to enhance participation, engagement, and academic success (Gaias et al., 2019). Culturally responsive classrooms can exhibit fewer behavior problems and increased academic engagement through affirming the student’s identity with the use of management, routines and strategies that facilitate and inclusive, equitable learning environment where student have sense of belonging and understanding (Gaias et al., 2019). Studies have shown that culturally responsive classroom are directly associated with the emotional climate of the classroom (Gaias et al., 2019). Additionally, because culturally responsive classrooms use a student centered approach to teaching, this form of classroom management recognizes students’ cultural backgrounds and experiences with regards to all aspects of their learning (Samuels, 2018). A culturally responsive classrooms is an inclusive classroom where more diverse views are shared and part of the classroom (Samuels, 2018). Students with disabilities have the opportunity to thrive in classrooms that practice being culturally responsive because of the inclusiveness, the value, and acceptance of different types of learners (Samuels, 2018).

Repeat Student-Teacher Matches
Repeat student-teacher matching is an educational classroom management strategy where an entire class moves on to the next grade entirely or mostly together for a sequential school year (Bierman, 2021). Repeat student-teacher matches has been said to enhance the working relationships between the student and teacher (Hill & Jones, 2018). Repeat student-teacher matches are when a specific student and teacher are matched together for consecutive years. The increase in familiarity between the teacher and student has empirical data showing a relationship between familiarity (understanding the student) and increased academic scores (Hill & Jones, 2018). Building relationships with students who have ED is an essential part of the student being open and available to learn with minimal disruptions in the classroom (Bierman, 2021).

**Student – Teacher Relationships**

Research shows that effective teachers build positive healthy relationships with students (Bierman, 2021). The teachers’ interactions and classroom management routines play a significant role in managing students with ED (Bierman, 2021). Teachers who demonstrated traits of being warm, sensitive, and open to supporting all students while still maintaining a cooperative and create an engaging environment in the classroom have shown to be effective with teaching students with ED (Bierman, 2021). Quality interactions, clear expectations, positive reinforcement, and non-punitive punishments may help build academic engagement and social-emotional stabilization within the classroom (Bierman, 2021). Teachers’ use of positive behavior and academic support and feedback allows for students to remain engaged and have more prosocial interactions (Bierman, 2021).

Research supports that how the teacher views a special education student correlates with their behavioral and academic performance in their classroom (Scanlon et al., 2020). If a teacher has low expectations for a student labeled with an ED that may increase problematic behaviors in
the classroom (Scanlon et al., 2020). Implicit attitudes can be a connection that a student makes with a teacher or an action (Cate & Glock, 2019). When students have had positive interactions with a teacher or a subject maintaining the implicit attitude is important for the student to remain positive in that environment (Cate & Glock, 2019).

**Trauma Informed Practice**

Trauma can significantly impact a student’s behavior (Price, 2022). General education teachers can facilitate trauma informed practices within their classroom to support students with ED (Price, 2022). Students who have experienced trauma such as abuse or neglect during their childhood can often present with difficulties that impact their academic performance, behavior, and social functioning (Morgan et al., 2015). Trauma-informed practices have teachers work to repair and guide students through adversity using co-regulation of emotions and are part of building and maintaining a caring trusting student-teacher relationship (Kim et al., 2021). Trauma-informed classrooms may create an environment for students who have emotional and/or behavioral needs (Kim et al., 2021). Trauma-informed is having a mindfulness based social emotional learning program where teachers are trained to help address and elevate stressors for students with ED (Kim et al., 2021).

Relational pedagogy in trauma informed practices enables students to be co-learners and gives them a sense of authority over their own education by teachers actively listening to student voice and respecting the relationship and learning processes (Morgan et al., 2015). Keeping relational pedagogy in trauma informed practices at the forefront of educational minds, gives researchers the ability to provide educators with effective strategies to bridge the gap and create an environment where students can feel safe and build trusting relationships with their teachers (Morgan et al., 2015).
Educator identity is part of the two-fold process when using trauma informed practices. Educator identity is how an educator views them self (Morgan et al., 2015). The second piece to the process of using trauma informed practices is educators being part of reflective practice groups. This is where educators can meaningfully reflect on their own relationship and use self-awareness to shape the student-teacher relationships (Morgan et al., 2015). When educators actively listen to their students, they can then implement reengagement strategies with their students so that they become more available for learning within the classroom (Morgan et al., 2015). When working with students who have an emotional disability or have experienced trauma, allowing time to build safe trusting relationships and taking the time needed during their learning is an important understanding for trauma informed practices (Morgan et al., 2015).

**Praise to Reprimand Ratios**

Using praise to reach students with ED is an effective strategy that teachers have used and can continue to use to bridge the success for students in mainstream classes (Caldarella et al., 2019). Students who have teachers who practice high praise to reprimand ratios demonstrate lower levels of noncompliance and higher levels of prosocial skills, engagement, enthusiasm and focus (Gewertz, 2020). Teachers who practice high praise to reprimand ratios have classrooms with fewer behavior disruptions and students who are able to self-regulate their emotions while in that setting (Caldarella et al., 2019). Teacher training and implementation of the praise to reprimand ratio strategy can significantly improve the effectiveness of teaching students with ED in mainstream classes (Gewertz, 2020). During instruction, it is highly effective to provide individualized reinforcement for on-task behavior and task completion at a high rate (Bettini, 2020). Praising students with ED at a very high rate (9:1) may increase academic and social engagement and be a very effective strategy for students with ED (Caldarella et al., 2018).
Some teachers who experience success with students who have ED in their classrooms provide students with visuals of tasks for the class that can be checked off when completed (Gewertz, 2020). Thoughtful planning of the daily tasks and scaffolding them by introducing a less demanding task first provides a greater opportunity for the student to achieve success with their academics for the student (Gewertz, 2020). Students labeled with ED can then be more willing to move on to more complex tasks and self-initiative (Bettini, 2020).

**Teacher Support**

Barriers can exist that prevent a teacher from building and maintaining relationships with students, and from implementing academic management frameworks and strategies who have been identified as ED (Davis, 2021). Professional development, resources, and collaboration are important components to the implementation process of frameworks and strategies (Berry, 2021; State et al., 2019; Talida et al., 2019). Research shows that there is an insufficient number of teachers who have quality training to be able to address the unique needs of students identified with ED (Davis, 2021). Teachers need to be provided with quality professional development that explains students’ disabilities in depth as well as provides research-based strategies that have been effective in mainstream classrooms for students with ED (Bettini, 2020). Teachers need the proper resources to be able to carry over these strategies across settings so that students can feel success in multiple environments (Bettini, 2020). Additionally, teachers also need time for collaboration so that they can discuss individualized plans and strategies that have worked for a particular student so that it can be generalized across settings (Bettini, 2020).

**Professional Development**

Students who have been identified with an emotional disability more often than not display disruptive behaviors through internalizing or externalizing, gaps in academic
achievement and a higher dropout rate than their nondisabled peers (Talida et al., 2019). It is important that students with ED receive research-based interventions for both academics and behavior from highly informed qualified teachers (Talida et al., 2019). Typically, teachers receive minimal professional development and it’s often not related to effective strategies and best practices for teaching students with ED (Talida et al., 2019). There is a breakdown of what is known about research-based best practices for teaching students with ED and the implementation of these practices in general education classrooms (State et al., 2019). A cause for the breakdown of knowledge and implementation of effective research-based strategies may be inadequate preservice training and opportunities for meaningful professional development (State et al., 2019). Students with emotional disabilities present a unique need within the educational setting (Talida et al., 2019). Appropriate professional development can target those unique needs of students with ED by providing training on best current frameworks and strategies, multi-tiered frameworks of supports, and how to implement strategies with fidelity (Talida et al., 2019).

Effective professional development for teachers can be defined as; (1) being intense and ongoing, (2) focuses of content knowledge and students learning, (3) aligns with leaning activities and school or district improvement goals, (4) provides teachers with the opportunity for active learning, (5) assists in developing strong working relationships amongst the teaching staff, (6) is job embedded or job specific, and (7) includes follow up after implementation (State et al., 2019). Practice-based professional development provides teachers with an environment to implement new framework or strategy skills, utilize corresponding resources and an opportunity to gain feedback from experts (McKeown et al., 2014). Professional development can also provide teachers with opportunities for sustained learning of content and pedagogy, which can
result in improved student outcomes (Liberty, 2013). The effects of teacher professional development on students who have been identified as ED can show increases in academic and behavioral outcomes (Liberty, 2013).

**Teacher Resources and Collaboration**

Proper professional development regarding research-based frameworks and strategies for teaching students with ED are often connected with needing resources (State et al., 2019). Professional Learning Committees (PLC) are groups of educators who come together with a shared goal or interest and work together using an inquiry based strategies to better the student learning process and target specific student needs (State et al., 2019). Establishing a working environment where teachers collectively share responsibilities for all students creates a valuable resource within school buildings (Bettini et al., 2020). Logistical resources are supports that teachers need to carry out their duties, they include curricular resources and planning time (Davis & Cummings, 2021). The availability of curricular resources for general education teachers is important to the collaboration efforts between special education and general education teachers (Davis & Cummings, 2021). Shared or common planning time between special education and general education teachers is a key component to working collaboratively when supporting students with ED (Davis & Cummings, 2021). Social resources are administrative support, school climate, and paraprofessional support (Davis & Cummings, 2021). Administrators support teachers’ knowledge and skills by creating and maintaining a positive school climate and provided opportunities for meaningful professional development. Parapersons support teachers’ skills by following and enforcing instructional and behavior management practices established by the teacher (Davis & Cummings, 2021).
Special education teachers and general education teachers need time to collaborate. Often, a student with emotional behavioral disability has a special education teacher as their case manager and general education teacher delivering the curriculum, making the collaboration imperative (Berry, 2021). Professional development can be used to provide clear guidelines for expectations from both the general education teacher and the special education teachers (Berry, 2021). General education teachers have an increasingly active role and involvement in the special education student’s academic career (Ghedin & Aquario, 2020). A general education teacher must be present at PPT meetings of any student with an IEP (IDEA, 2004). The general education teacher can help bridge the gap of accommodations and supports needed in the general education classroom for a student to be successful (Ghedin & Aquario, 2020).

Summary

The three overarching themes that were outlined within the review of relevant literature were academic management, classroom management, and student-teacher relationships. Each of these frameworks and strategies may increase behavioral and academic success for students with an emotional disability in the classroom (Caldarella et al., 2018). The conceptual framework included the researcher’s personal experiences with teaching students identified with ED, the topical research presented in the literature review, and the theoretical framework. The theoretical framework that was identified for this study is constructivist teaching/learning theory. More specifically, this qualitative phenomenological study used the sociocultural theory of cognitive development as the theoretical framework used to address the central phenomenon. The literature reviewed included a variety of research based academic management frameworks and strategies to include Universal Design Learning, self-monitoring in UDL, explicit instruction strategy, differentiated instruction, instructional choice strategy, guided instruction, and
competency-based education strategy. Additionally, the literature review included research based classroom management frameworks and strategies; Positive Behavior Intervention Support, social emotional learning, culturally responsive classroom, and repeat student-teacher matches. The literature review also incorporated the relevant topics of student-teacher relationship frameworks and strategies: trauma informed practice and praise to reprimand ratio strategy. Additionally, teacher support strategies and practices such as professional development, resources, and the importance of collaboration are all identified as research based for teaching students identified with ED. All of the literature that was presented informed the purpose of this study, exploring the lived experiences of public K-12 general education teachers with research-based frameworks and strategies for students in the classroom who are identified with emotional disability (Lanterman et al., 2021; Mitchell et al., 2019; Woodcock & Woolfson, 2019; Zarate & Maggin, 2021).
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This qualitative phenomenological study was designed to explore the lived experiences of general education teachers regarding the use of evidence-based frameworks and practices in the classroom for students identified with an emotional disability. The problem explored through this phenomenological study is focused on identifying the research-based frameworks and strategies used in the general education classroom, to effectively educate students who are identified as having an emotional disability (ED) (Lanterman et al., 2021; Mitchell et al., 2019; Woodcock & Woolfson, 2019; Zarate & Maggin, 2021). The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of public K-12 general education teachers with research-based frameworks and strategies for students in the classroom who are identified with emotional disability. Exploring research-based frameworks and strategies that are being implemented in the mainstream classroom is important (Lanterman et al., 2021; Mitchell et al., 2019; Woodcock & Woolfson, 2019; Zarate & Maggin, 2021).

The Individuals with Disabilities Educational Act (2004) requires and expects teachers to use research-based frameworks and strategies when teaching special education students with or without ED (Zarate & Maggin, 2021). This study explored three core research questions that will gain the perceptions and understanding of the participants’ experiences: (1) How do public K-12 general education teachers describe the use of research-based academic management frameworks and strategies in the general education classroom for students identified with an emotional disability?, (2) How do public K-12 general education teachers describe the use of research-based classroom management frameworks and strategies in the general education classroom for students identified with an emotional disability?, and (3) How do public K-12 general education
teachers describe the use of research-based student-teacher relationships frameworks and strategies in the general education classroom for students identified with an emotional disability?

Exploring the lived experiences of general education teachers who teach students with ED in their general education classroom will address the central phenomenon being studied (Evans et al., 2012). It is important to know if general education teachers use the frameworks and strategies that are research-based for academic management and classroom management, and also to understand the teacher’s perceived effectiveness of the framework or strategy being used (Gaastra et al., 2022). The researcher's own lived experiences led her to understand that there may be a gap between the intent of research-based frameworks and strategies and the actual implementation of the research-based frameworks and strategies in the general education classroom. This study will give these teachers a voice and allow them to share their perceptions of the central phenomenon through the interview process (Johnston, 2022).

In selecting the methodology for this study, understanding the participants’ lived experiences when teaching students identified with an emotional disability, it was clear that this was a qualitative phenomenological study. A qualitative study looks to obtain a deep understanding of a social setting or activity from the perspective of the researcher (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). Qualitative research seeks to find and understand meaning of an experience, while the researcher is reflective about perspective, and the design of the research remains open and flexible (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). Phenomenological research involve several in-depth interviews with participants who have experienced the phenomenon being studied (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). While choosing the methodology for this study, four guiding principles were considered; (1) problem and research questions to be investigated, (2) purpose of the study, (3) theory basis, and (4) nature of the data (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). A clear understanding of the
central phenomenon has been developed and the research questions were crafted in an open-ended format so that to capture the participants’ experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The data was collected by conducting interviews from a small sample group of general education teachers. The views of the participants were collected and then represented in the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). After the interviews were conducted the researcher then analyzes, interprets, and identifies themes in the findings. While the literature review provides information about the phenomenon of this study, the researcher has learned more from the participants through semi-structured interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The literature review provides justification for furthering this study on looking at the generalization of research-based strategies and best practices for teaching students identified with emotional disabilities. The framework previously identified that bridges the methodology to the study are constructivist teaching and learning theory. Constructivist teaching and learning theory advocates a participatory approach in which students actively participate in the learning process (Fernando & Marikar, 2017). The content in Chapter 3 includes site information and demographics, participants and sampling method, instrumentation and data collections, data analysis, limitation delimitations and ethical issues, and trustworthiness.

**Site Information and Demographics**

The site that was selected for this qualitative research study was done so by the researcher following Ravitch and Carl’s (2016) sampling process that consist of several steps: (1) selecting a site that matches your research goals, (2) identifying situations in the site that are relevant for the topic of study, (3) selecting concrete situations in which the topic of study can become visible, and (4) identifying other types of situations that influence the topic of study. The site chosen for this study was the state of Connecticut. According to Connecticut State
Department of Education (2022), the state has 169 school districts with 935 public schools. There are currently 39,049 K-12 public general education teachers in Connecticut.

**Participants and Sampling Method**

Sampling is selecting a smaller number of individuals for the study so that the individuals are a representation of a larger group referred to as the population (Roberts et al., 2019). The volunteer population for this study was K-12 public general education teachers with whom work with students identified as having an emotional disability. The participants for this study were identified through purposeful sampling which is based on locations and specific people to interview who best can help to understand the phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Purposeful homogeneous sampling was chosen because it allows for impactful responses to the research questions as well as individuals professional first handed experiences. Homogenous sampling was selected because the participants possess similar traits and are a subgroup that had specific characteristics (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Choosing a site and participants are both purposeful sampling as the purpose was to collect the most meaningful data possible (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested a sampling size between three to 15 participants. The researcher of this study sought eight participants, through a social media platform. The participant information sheet (APPENDIX A) was included as an attachment in the recruitment post (APPENDIX B) that was shared to the Connecticut Teachers Facebook Page during the recruitment phase. The participants who choose to participate in the study contacted the researcher though their UNE email, and the first eight participants who responded were invited to an interview. If more than eight participants responded they were notified that they were not selected. The researcher held the names and emails of the interested participants in a master list.
The master list was destroyed after the participants verify the transcripts of their interview. The researcher protected the participant’s privacy by adhering to the following guidelines: 1) the interview was conducted in a private setting to ensure that others cannot hear the conversation between the participant and the researcher, 2) participants were informed that they have the option to not turn on their camera if they choose, and 3) ensuring that private data are not collected without the participant’s knowledge and consent. Additionally, the participants for this study self-identified by meeting the specific criteria: 1) 18 years of age or over, 2) Connecticut State certified K-12 general education teacher, and 3) has worked or works with students identified as ED. The participant information sheet was also read at the start of the interview. After reading through the participant information sheet, participants were asked if they wish to continue. Participants had an opportunity to discuss any questions or concerns before the interview began. The participants acknowledged verbally that they would like to proceed with the interview.

**Instrumentation and Data Collection**

After receiving an exemption determination letter from the University of New England’s Institutional review Board (APPENDIX C), this study began with a recruitment flyer that was posted to the Connecticut Teacher Facebook Page. This a private Facebook page that consists of 1,400 Connecticut teachers. There is a screening process to be a member of this particular Facebook pages that asks a series of short answer and multiple choice questions. The screening process is set up for the group’s administrator to verify that all member are teachers in the state of Connecticut. The group is intended to provide collegial support, information, and ask/answer questions in a safe and comfortable environment. This recruitment flyer also contained the Participant Information Sheet as an attachment.
The researcher used semi-structured interviews to gather data from the participants that was used to better understand the central phenomenon. This phenomenological study presented qualitative interview data, examining general education teacher’s perspectives. The researcher engaged with the participants through one-on-one semi-structured interviews to gain a better understanding of subjective meanings which lead to findings that are informed by the data rather than the researcher’s own preconceptions and assumptions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). The interviews were conducted, recorded, and transcribed using Zoom. The researcher anticipated that the interviews would last between 60-90 minutes, depending on the need for follow up questions and the amount of information provided by the participants.

The recruitment post invited potential participants to self-identify as meeting the study criteria of 1) being 18 years of age or over, 2) a Connecticut State certified K-12 general education teacher, and 3) has worked or works with students identified as ED. The researcher then gathered potential participants’ names and emails which were held on the master list. Interviews were scheduled with the participants and the interview protocol and interview questions were developed specifically to align with the research questions as well as the theoretical framework that guides the researcher through this process.

At the start of each interview the researcher went over the Participant Information Sheet to make sure the participants understood the purpose of the interview, the data collection and analysis process, and the participant’s rights. The participants has the option to have their cameras on or off. The participant also had the opportunity to skip a question if they preferred not to answer. Participants were also able to withdraw from the study at any time up until the interview has been completed and the master list had been destroyed. If a participant withdrew
from the study, any data collected from that participant would be destroyed. All eight participants participated fully in the study and no participants withdrew at any point.

After, the audio recorded interviews were auto transcribed in Zoom and reviewed for accuracy by the researcher, then they were sent to each participant to review for accuracy. The transcripts were sent to each participant via email and they were provided five business days to review, retract, or withdraw information. After five business days, if no revisions were suggested by the participant, the transcript was considered accurate. After these same five business days have passed, all identifying information was deidentified from the transcripts through the use of pseudonyms and the Zoom audio recording was deleted. The Zoom recordings, transcripts, and Master List was stored on a password protected computer accessible only to the researcher. The Master List was deleted once all interviews were completed and all transcripts were member checked.

**Data Analysis**

Creswell and Poth (2018) outline a five-step analysis process. The five steps are as follows: 1) Preparing and organizing the data for analysis. The interviews were conducted through Zoom, and are anticipated to last 60-90 minutes. The audio recordings were transcribed and emailed to the participants to be reviewed. Participants had five business days to review the transcript and make any corrections needed. 2) Reviewing the data and identify emerging ideas. The researcher carefully read through each of the transcripts noting the depth of the content as well as the quality. Then the researcher began the coding process. 3) Describing groups of meaning, coding, and determining themes. Coding is when the research makes sense of the data by dividing it into segments, examining codes for overlap and then collapses the codes into themes (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). 4) Developing and assessing the interpretation of the
themes. The researcher developed five themes for the study that will represent multiple perspectives. 5) Representing the data through description or visual. This final step included creating a narrative approach to represent the themes.

**Limitations, Delimitations and Ethical Issues**

Limitations can be described as features of the study that the researcher knows may affect the results of the study (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). Limitations can include the assumptions identified by the researcher as well as the population, sample size, demographics, and the constraints that are associated with methods design (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). Delimitations are the boundaries set by the researcher and may narrow the scope of the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). Ethical issues consider that the researcher should be conducted in a way that minimizes potential harm to participants in the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018).

**Limitations**

Bloomberg and Volpe (2018) describe limitations of the study as “are those characteristics of design or methodology that impacted or influenced the interpretation of the findings from the research” (p. 207). There were several limitations to be considered in this phenomenological research study, personal biases were a limitation that is inherent in human experience and may vary in degree (Blomberg & Volpe, 2018). The researcher used Creswell and Gutterman’s (2019) guidelines, maintaining truthfulness when collecting and reporting data, and incorporating scholarly works. Overall, the research data was gathered voluntarily, ethically, and with the specific intent of answering the research questions to ensure no conflicts of interest.

**Delimitations**

Delimitations can be defined as setting boundaries for this study, these describe how the researcher narrowed down the study’s scope (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). This study only included
public K-12 general education teachers who teach in Connecticut, leaving out unified arts (physical education, art, music, etc.) and related services teachers (speech and language, guidance) and special education teachers. This study included only general education teacher perspectives who have worked with or work with students identified with emotional disability, leaving out special education teachers who do not work with students identified with an emotional disability. Other delimitations for this study included the limited amount of time that the research was conducted and the recruitment of participants concluded after the first eight participants self-identified.

**Ethical Issues**

The Belmont Report defines and explains the three guiding principles for the protection of human subjects of research (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). The three ethical principles identified by the Belmont Report are respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). The first principle, respect for persons, outlines two distinguished moral requirements. First, the researcher acknowledged autonomy and second, to protect those with diminished autonomy (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). While conducting this study, the researcher put forth best effort to maximize benefit and minimize harm. The second principle identified by the Belmont Report, beneficence, requires and deeper focus on assessment of risk and benefit to ensure that the researcher treats the persons with respect by protecting from harm and making efforts to maintain well-being (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). The third principle, justice, provides fairness in distribution of the study on the

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness can also be referred to as validity, is an important component of a qualitative research design (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Ensuring that the research is held to a high level of rigor leads to trustworthiness that is necessary for the study to be solid and credible (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Trustworthiness is an active methodological process, this process is the central value of a qualitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

**Credibility**

Credibility is when the participants perceptions match with the researchers’ portrayal of them (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). The researcher ensured the credibility of the interview though the verification process of the transcripts by the participants. This gives the participant the opportunity to check that the researcher accurately represented what the participant thinks, feels and does. The researcher considers the concept of epoche, which involves bracketing the researcher’s personal experiences as much as possible, to take an unbiased perspective of the phenomenon being studied (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018).

**Transferability**

Transferability refers to the creation and development of descriptive and specific findings that directly relate to the study, which can then make it possible for readers to decide a similar process might be in their own settings or communities (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). This study used purposeful sampling of public K-12 general education teachers in the state of Connecticut who have worked with or do work with students identified as ED. The participants for this study were specific, which makes the transferability low.
Dependability

Bloomberg and Volpe (2018) state that “dependability refers to the stability and consistency of data over time” (p. 204). In this study the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with the participants. The interviews used an Interview Protocol, Participant Information Sheet, and be audio recorded using Zoom. After the interview, participants were given the opportunity to review and verify their transcripts for dependability. The researcher used Creswell’s (2018) five-step data analysis process.

Confirmability

When the researcher’s findings and interpretations are clearly drawn from the data, which required the researcher to articulate how the conclusion has been made, this provides the study with confirmability (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). The researcher hoped to portray that the findings are the result of the research and not an outcome of biases or subjectivity (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). The researcher used member checking for the interview transcripts to assist in achieving confirmability of this study.

Summary

This qualitative phenomenological study was designed to explore the lived experiences of general education teachers regarding the use of evidence-based frameworks and practices in the classroom for students identified with an emotional disability. The problem explored through this phenomenological study was focused on identifying the research-based frameworks and strategies used in the general education classroom, to effectively educate students who are identified as having an emotional disability (Lanterman et al., 2021; Mitchell et al., 2019; Woodcock & Woolfson, 2019; Zarate & Maggin, 2021). The purpose of this qualitative
The site chosen for this study was the state of Connecticut. The population for this study included K-12 public general education teachers who work with students identified as having an emotional disability. The participants for this study were identified through purposeful sampling which is based on locations and specific people to interview who best can help to understand the phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher used semi-structured interviews to gather data from the participants that were used to better understand the central phenomenon. This phenomenological study presented qualitative interview data examining general education teacher’s perspectives. The researcher used Creswell and Poth’s (2018) outline of the five-step analysis process for the data analysis. Limitations, delimitations, and ethical issues were all explained and addressed in this chapter. Trustworthiness was presented and the researcher has outlined credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability for this study.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This qualitative phenomenological study was designed to explore the lived experiences of general education teachers regarding the use of evidence-based frameworks and practices in the classroom for students identified with an emotional disability. The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of public K-12 general education teachers with research-based frameworks and strategies for students in the classroom who are identified with emotional disability. Exploring research-based frameworks and strategies that were being implemented in the mainstream classroom is important (Lanterman et al., 2021; Mitchell et al., 2019; Woodcock & Woolfson, 2019; Zarate & Maggin, 2021).

This study was framed based on the importance to know if general education teachers use the frameworks and strategies that are research-based for academic management and classroom management (Gaastra et al., 2022). This chapter presents the methods and analysis used to answer the three core research questions and presents the findings. The three core research questions guiding this study were: (1) How do public K-12 general education teachers describe the use of research-based academic management frameworks and strategies in the general education classroom for students identified with an emotional disability?, (2) How do public K-12 general education teachers describe the use of research-based classroom management frameworks and strategies in the general education classroom for students identified with an emotional disability?, and (3) How do public K-12 general education teachers describe the use of research-based student-teacher relationships frameworks and strategies in the general education classroom for students identified with an emotional disability?

This study was guided by the constructivist teaching/learning theory which acknowledges and builds on a foundation around the concept that teaching is not the transmitting of
information. Instead, it is the process of acquiring knowledge that builds upon prior knowledge or experiences (Fernando & Marikar, 2017). More specifically, this qualitative phenomenological study used the sociocultural theory of cognitive development as the theoretical framework used to address the central phenomenon. Vygotsky’s (1934) sociocultural theory of cognitive development views human development as a socially mediated process where cultural values, beliefs, and problem-solving skills through dialogue with more knowledgeable people are gained (McLeod, 2018). The study’s semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix C) focused on the lived experiences of public K-12 general education teachers with research-based frameworks and strategies for students with emotional disabilities (ED). The research questions were created to better understand the gap between the intent of research-based frameworks and strategies and the actual implementation of the research-based frameworks and strategies in the general education classroom.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section is an overview of the data collection process and analysis method. The second section highlights the themes and subthemes that have emerged from the data. The concluding section summarizes the results and findings of this study. This chapter contains relevant, qualitative findings collected during interviews with K-12 general education teachers.

**Analysis Method**

Data collection began after receiving an exemption determination letter from the University of New England’s Institutional Review Board (APPENDIX D). The study began with a recruitment flyer (APPENDIX A) and Participant Information Sheet (APPENDIX B) which were posted to the Connecticut Teacher Facebook Page. The entire recruitment process took approximately six weeks. The recruitment flyer and Participant Information Sheet was re-posted
four times to the Connecticut Teacher Facebook Page, until eight participants were recruited for the study.

The participant criteria for this study included participants that were 1) 18 years of age or over, 2) Connecticut State certified K-12 general education teachers, and 3) have worked or currently work with students identified with an emotional disability, allowing participants to understand their lived experiences and provide data for the researcher to answer the research problems (Creswell, 2013). All communication between the researcher and participants was conducted through email, including setting up a Zoom interview for each participant. Interviews were audio-recorded using Zoom and were transcribed using the auto transcription feature in Zoom. The downloaded transcripts were sent to the participants within five-business days interview. After five business days, there were no revisions suggested by the participants, and the transcripts were considered accurate. The transcripts were then deidentified with the use of pseudonyms to protect the participants’ privacy. The audio-recorded Zoom interviews lasted an average of 45 minutes with one outlier lasting 30 minutes.

To analyze the data, all notes and transcripts were reviewed and organized using a spreadsheet. The coding process began following the immersive transcript review. During the initial phase of coding, the main ideas that emerged from each participant response to each question were identified and labeled. Main ideas from interview question responses were recorded for each participant’s transcript on a spreadsheet and were denoted with single words, short phrases, or segments of text. These initial codes were further collapsed by combining like codes. Finally, the most frequent codes were developed into themes as commonalities clearly emerged from the data. After analysis, three themes emerged and they were (1) self-identified
teaching barriers in the general education classroom, (2) the importance of knowing students in their environment, and (3) differentiation for students with an emotional disability.

**Presentation of Results and Findings**

The overarching themes provided an understanding of the participants’ lived experiences with the central phenomenon of research based frameworks and strategies for teaching students with an emotional disability. The subthemes represent the notable specific elements that participants commonly identified as factors under the larger theme, which impacted the role of a general education teacher teaching students identified with an emotional disability in the general education setting. The first heading provides background information about each of the participants. The next section provides the interview questions, participant answers, and evidence of the participants’ experiences as it relates to each of the interview questions. Lastly, after the coding process was conducted, themes and subthemes were presented and discussed in detail.

**Participants**

The first two questions in the semi-structured interviews prompted each of the participants to provide background information, (1) how long they have worked as a general education teacher, and (2) their roles and responsibilities as a general education teacher teaching students identified with emotional disability. Below are vignettes of each participant to provide background information about the participants of this study. Participants have been assigned pseudonyms to protect their privacy and confidentiality.

**Jody**

Jody has been a general education teacher for 14 years. She has taught grade three and grade four. She has also taught as a high school library medial specialist and an elementary school library media teacher. She described her roles and responsibilities as a general education
teacher teaching students identified with an emotional disability as following Individualized Educational Plan’s (IEP) and behavior plans, attending Planning and Placement Team (PPT), 504 and parent meetings, collaboration with specialists, and providing the same education experiences to all students to help them succeed.

Lisa

Lisa has been a general education teacher for 19 years. She described her roles and responsibilities as a general education teacher teaching students identified with an emotional disability as attending meetings and teaching a small population of special education students in her general education classroom.

Mary

Mary has been a secondary general education teacher for 17 years. She described her roles and responsibilities as a general education teacher teaching students identified with an emotional disability as being a mentor to students and teaching them along with every other student in her classroom. She collaborated with families to help make the transition from home to school easier. She also collaborated with her students’ special education teacher when they wrote new goals and objectives so that she could provide an update and give input.

Jen

Jen has been a general education health teacher for 14 years. She described her roles and responsibilities as a general education teacher teaching students identified with an emotional disability as a strong collaborator with the student’s special education teacher. She followed the student IEP’s, and if she had any questions or concerns regarding accommodations, modifications or the student’s disability, she would contact their special education teacher.

Emma
Emma was in her third year of being a general education teacher. She taught in a flexible learning classroom, which is designated for students with emotional disabilities. Students who were in the flexible learning classroom are taught by general education teachers, allowing students to access the general education curriculum while also being supported by special education teachers throughout the day according to Emma. She described her roles and responsibilities as a general education teacher teaching students identified with an emotional disability as addressing emotional concerns, providing instruction, attending PPT meetings, and answering questions that students have throughout the day.

**Jack**

Jack was in his 21st year of teaching physical education and health. He has taught physical education and health in Pre-K through grade 12 over the 21 years. He was currently teaching at the high school level. He described his roles and responsibilities as a general education teacher teaching students identified with an emotional disability as planning and implementing lessons for all students. He attended and contributed in 504 and PPT meetings. Jack also followed IEP’s and implemented curriculum modifications when required and provides students with access to their accommodations.

**Donna**

Donna was in her 14th year of teaching grade five in an elementary school setting. She has taught only 5th grade for the past 14 years. She described her roles and responsibilities as a general education teacher teaching students identified with an emotional disability as collaborating and co-teaching with the special education teacher, communicating with paraprofessionals who help support students with IEP and 504’s in the general education setting, and attending meetings and differentiation of lessons to meet all students where they are.
Chris

Chris was currently a second grade teacher. He had been a general education teacher for 15 years. He has also taught grade three. Chris described his roles and responsibilities as a general education teacher teaching students identified with an emotional disability as following IEPs and 504 plans in the general education setting with the support of the special education teacher.

Academic Management

For each interview, there were different blocks of semi-structured interview questions. The first block of questions was around academic management. When teachers use research based instructional frameworks or strategies, it increases academic and social engagement and avoids academic and social failure in the general education classroom (Ennis et al., 2020). Interview question one asked participants to describe any challenges that they had with academic management when teaching students identified with an emotional disability.

Jody stated that her academic management challenges when working with students identified with an emotional disability included the lack of support to follow IEP’s and a lack of support personnel in the general education classroom such as paraprofessionals, BCBA’s, and special education teachers. Jody felt that when support was provided, it was minimal and not consistent. Mary stated that her academic management challenges when working with students with an emotional disability stemmed from her inability to be flexible with teaching curriculum. Mary said, “Teaching a standard based curriculum to students with an emotional disability is challenging”. Mary talked about teachers not being able to have a growth mindset in their practice, which made the teaching and learning process feel rigid and constricted. Jen said her biggest academic management challenges when teaching students with an emotional disability
were following accommodations and modifications when it does not align with the curriculum. Jen stated, “It’s difficult when students have topic restriction on their IEP’s”. For example, the IEP may say that the student cannot participate in the mental health unit of the health curriculum. The subject matter that Jen teaches has moved towards skills-based learning which is helpful for students identified with ED. Emma discussed an academic management challenge when teaching students identified with an emotional disability as the district having “unrealistic expectations of keeping up with the curriculum”. Emma stated that when students are not emotionally sound, they are not able to engage academics and instead they will engage in non-productive behaviors. Jack described his academic management challenges as stemming from lack of time to learn about each of his students individually, he said, “It takes time to build a relationship, and there’s simply no time built in for that”. Chris described his academic management challenges as having too many students in his classroom and not enough support staff to help manage small group instruction and keep students on task.

The second interview question, “What strategies have you used to manage these challenges and how were they useful?”, yielded the following responses from the participants. Jody stated that useful strategies to manage academic challenges in her classroom included making personal connections with students, discovering student strengths and challenges, setting clear expectations in the classroom, and using purposeful planning when creating lesson plans. Lisa described building relationships with students as useful strategies for managing academic challenges. Emma has experienced being a constant support, having solid routines, and providing a safe space for academic learning as important strategies when considering academic management in her classroom. Jack stated that a strategy he uses for managing the academic challenges are emphasizing routines and having clear academic and behavioral expectations. He
stated, “I like to post visuals for reminders of expectations in the classroom for all students”.
Donna discussed that having positive healthy relationships with students and being clear with expectations are strategies that usually work for her in the general education classroom with academic management for students identified with an emotional disability. Chris described grouping students and providing engaging activities in which students can complete either independently or in small groups without direct instruction, which then allows him time to focus on students with higher levels of need.

Interview question three focused on Universal Design Learning (UDL). Universal Design Learning is a framework that has three guiding principles that guide educators to support all learners by providing multiple ways of engaging students, representing knowledge, and demonstrating understanding (Cook, 2017). Responses to this question, “How would you describe the use of Universal Design Instruction within your classroom and what strategies do you use to support this framework?”, included the following responses.

Jody described her use of strategies to support Universal Design Learning as offering instruction choice as much as possible, using purposeful planning and differentiating daily lessons based on student need. Mary stated that the strategies she uses to support Universal Design Learning as grouping students for learning activities and continuously updating lesson plans. Mary said, “It’s all about the planning and being prepared”. Jen also supported Universal Design Learning by posting daily objectives so that students are prepared for what they will be learning that day. Jen stated, “With the objectives posted, students have time to mentally prepare for what’s to come”. Jack also supports these strategies though differentiating his teaching so that he can reach is students in a variety of different ways. He discussed how it is important to remain flexible and provide students with choice. He also utilizes group or partner work as
strategies that support Universal Design Learning in his classroom. Donna said, “It’s all in the planning, Universal Design Learning is everywhere”; she tries to plans lessons that can reach all students in her classroom. Chris described his use of strategies to support Universal Design Learning as planning engaging lessons for all students and using grouping to maximize his use of time.

Interview question four asked participants to describe their preparedness to use research based frameworks and strategies for academic management in their classroom for teaching students identified with an emotional disability. Jody, Lisa, Jen, Emma, Jack, Donna, and Chris all identified that they were not formally prepared to use research-based frameworks and strategies for academic management in their classrooms when teaching students identified with an emotional disability. All seven teachers said that they use strategies that were self-taught. Lisa said that she is willing to try any strategy in her classroom that would help her be more prepared to work with students identified with an emotional disability. She also shared, “Initially, when I started teaching I did not feel prepared at all, but overtime I have become a better practitioner and feel more prepared to use research based strategies.” Jack shared that it is his own personal research that helps him to feel prepared when working with students identified as ED in his class and that there is no guidance from the district provided. He also shared that he has collaborated with the students’ special education teacher when he has felt as though he needed further support. Mary reported that although she is a general education teacher, she was passionate about working with students with disabilities and feels that her personal experiences have made her feel as though she has a solid background and is prepared to teach students with an emotional disability.
Interview question five asked participants to describe the availability of materials and resources for academic management within their school concerning research based frameworks and strategies for teaching students identified with an emotional disability. Participants responded with the following information. Mary and Emma both reported that they would be given a resource if they asked for them however, it is not readily available or offered to them. Emma explained further that it would be challenging to identify herself what materials or resources to ask for, and would need guidance from a district specialist such as the behaviorist or special education director. Jack shared that available resources his is district are minimal at best for academic management. He noted, “I don’t feel like there is a lot of support with resources and materials for academic management necessarily provided by my district”. Jody stated that she feels general education teachers are often overlooked when it comes to resources and materials for academic management when teaching students with and emotional disability. Jen mentioned, “Technology is widely used by teaching staff in our district, I feel like that is a resource that is available and used, also collaboration with special education teachers is also something that’s available upon request”. Lisa noted that she works in a large urban school district where there is not a lot of funding. “I think the district does the best they can with providing resources for academic management”.

**Classroom Management**

The second block of questions was around classroom management. Classroom management includes, organizing the physical environment, defining and teaching expectations for behavior, preventing minor conflicts from escalating into major confrontations, and communicating with families (Williams et al., 2022). During the semi-structured interview, interview question six focused on challenges with classroom management that participants have
experienced when working with students identified with an emotional disability. Lisa and Donna described inconsistencies as the biggest challenge she has with classroom management when teaching students with an emotional disability in the general education classroom. Donna stated that the support staff is very inconsistent which, in her opinion, leads to student inconsistencies. Jody and Mary both described the dynamics of the classroom as a challenge, saying that all it takes is one interruption, change or behavior to throw the classroom management off its course. Lisa, Emma, and Chris described managing different needs and emotions at the same time as a major classroom management challenge. Chris shared, “Being a second grade teacher, peer modeling is very important, so when a disruptive or unexpected behavior occurs, I have a tendency to turn all of my attention to that student to prevent a ripple effect in the room”. Emma reported that when one student is visibly or audibly upset in the classroom it can become a distraction to others in the classroom who are trying to work.

Interview question seven asked participants to describe the frameworks or strategies they have used to manage classroom management challenges they have experienced. All eight participants described one of their strategies that they use to manage challenges in the general education classroom, teaching students identified with an emotional disability as building relationships and making connections. Emma shared that she uses a check-in form with students so that they can rate how they are feeling and rate their level of distress prior to class starting. She continued, “I have noticed that students fill out these forms much more accurately once they trust you and have connected with you”. Mary reported, “Building trust, getting to know them, and connecting with them before you teach is probably my number one strategy for classroom management”. Donna affirmed that when she meets her students, she immediately makes and effort to find a common interest with them so that they can build a relationship through making
connections. Jen and Jack also discussed creating a safe welcoming environment for students is a strategy they use for classroom management for teaching students identified with an emotional disability.

Interview question eight focused on social and emotional learning (SEL) which is a process where individuals can acquire the knowledge, skills, and an attitude to manage emotions, feel empathy for others, and achieve individual and collective goals within an academic setting (Fundamentals of SEL, 2021). This may look like students using pre-taught self-management and regulation skills to manage their emotional and allow for increased time for academic learning (McCormick, 2015). When asked, “How would you describe the use of social emotional teaching and learning within your classroom?”, the following responses were provided.

Jody stated that she has been trained through a professional development in restorative practices and likes using these practices in her classroom. She went into further detail describing how social emotional learning is a component of restorative practices and she felt as though a lot of it “is just good teaching” and was surprised that other teachers do not implement this framework naturally. Lisa felt that students should come to school already equipped with SEL skills and that teaching SEL is not in the curriculum and there is not time to teach SEL with fidelity. She shared, “I think it is assumed by that point eleventh and twelfth graders have been taught these strategies and how to cope or identify a concern”. Mary similarly stated that because she was a high school teacher, most of her students who are identified with an emotional disability have already been taught the coping skills that they need to be able to remain in the classroom and work through their emotions. Mary also reported that students needed to have the SEL foundational skills, and these skills should be prioritized over academics. Mary and Jen both expressed that they needed to be flexible in the classroom and help their students access their
coping skills if needed. Jen discussed that being realistic with student workload helps them socially and emotionally get through their day. Jen also shared, “It’s important for students to feel comfortable in their learning environment so that they can use their skills when needed”. Emma said that her students often access their SEL skills through their Dialectical Behavior Training. Dialectical Behavior Training is a research-based framework that focuses on problem solving and acceptance based strategies (Hastings et al., 2022). Emma continued, “Understating what skills your student already has is key because, you can then prompt them in the moment to use a skill”.

Interview question nine asked participants to describe their preparedness to use research-based frameworks and strategies for classroom management in their classroom for students identified with an emotional disability. Three participants, Emma, Jody, and Lisa have had professional development or training on a specific framework or strategies for classroom management. Mary, Jen, Jack, Donna, and Chris all affirmed that despite not having formal training on a framework or strategy for classroom management when teaching students identified with an emotional disability, they do feel prepared because of personal experiences. Donna reflected, “I’m probably not as prepared as a special education teacher because they are specifically trained to manage special education students, but I feel confident that I can connect with students and manage my classroom with the experience that I do have”. Jack shared that his experience comes from talking with colleagues and doing his own research. He also explained that he notes what strategies have worked and not worked in the past and keeps that in mind when working with students identified with ED.

The tenth interview question asked participants to describe the availability of materials and resources for classroom management within their school concerning research-based
frameworks and strategies for teaching students identified with an emotional disability. Jody, Jen, Jack, and Donna all stated that the availability of materials and resources are greatly lacking. Lisa described a classroom management framework that the district implements districtwide called Character Counts. Character Counts is a framework that provides a meaningful, measurable, and a sustainable framework to help PK-12 schools focus on character skills and shape a positive culture (Character Counts, 2023). She stated that all new staff is provided materials and resources to implement this classroom management framework when they are hired. Mary and Emma both shared that the materials and resources are not readily available; however, if you ask for a material or resources, it is very likely that you can have it. Chris stated, “The school district has a professional library located at the district’s Central Office building and it’s 8 miles from the building I teach in”. He went on to say that he is not sure what materials they have available there; the materials are not advertised to the staff.

**Student-Teacher Relationships**

The third block of semi structured interview questions was around student-teacher relationships. Research shows that effective teachers build positive healthy relationships with students (Bierman, 2021). Interview question 11, asked participants to describe any challenges that they had with student-teacher relationships when teaching students identified with an emotional disability. All eight participants described lack of time to connect and build relationships as being the biggest challenge.

Jack shared that when there is not a background to your relationship with students, it makes it more difficult to help the student in a moment of crisis. Jack said, “For example, if there is not time to connect with a student, it makes it nearly impossible to help defuse a situation without knowing what helps the student in distress”. Jody stated that students who have
emotional disabilities need extra attention and she feels as though “every second of my day has been prescribed by administration so there is not extra time to give attention to these students”.

Emma reported that providing any kind of feedback has been challenging when a relationship with the student has not been established. Chris has experienced that students with emotional disabilities are not able to trust authority figures and finds this challenging to manage.

Interview question 12 asked the participants to describe strategies that they have used to manage the student-teacher relationship challenges. Mary, Jen, Emma, and Chris all described at least one of their strategies to manage challenges when teaching students with an emotional disability as either communication and/or collaboration. Emma, Jack, and Donna all described at least one of their strategies to manage challenges when teaching students with an emotional disability as creating trusting relationships with students. Jen expressed that utilizing support services, collaborating with colleagues, and communicating with families have been effective in her experiences. Mary shared, “a lot of communication” as being strategies that she has used to manage student-teacher relationship challenges. She communicates with the student, their family, other teachers who work with the student and the students’ special education teacher. She added that her students know that she has a “clean slate policy”, every day when her students walk into her class, they get a fresh start regardless of what happened the day before. Emma indicated that trust is the most important strategy that she has experienced and she reminds herself with every student “you need to connect before you correct”, this means that connecting with her students’ needs to happen before she can lean into academics.

Interview question 13 described praise to reprimand ratio as a strategy that provides individualized reinforcement for on-task behavior and task completion at a high rate (Caldarella et al., 2019). For example during instruction, a teacher would provide individualized reinforcement for on-
task behavior and task completion at a high rate, praising students with ED at a 9:1 ratio. Participants were asked, “How would you describe the use of praise to reprimand ration when working with students identified with ED?”

Lisa, Jack, and Chris all shared that they are not able to quantify their praise to reprimand ratio in the general education classroom when teaching students identified with and emotional disability. Lisa commented, “I find that hard to quantify at this point, but I think that I do a lot more positive praise than reprimand”. Jack similarly commented, “I don’t know my exact ratio, I’ve never tried to track that, but I do send out a lot of praise to my students”. Emma stated that she uses praise to help build the confidence of all of her students especially her students identified with an emotional disability. Emma and Donna both stated that it is important to know your students and how they would react to public praise before implementing this strategy. They both have experienced students with an emotional disability reacting negatively when singled out for both positive and negative reinforcements.

Interview Question 14 asked participants to describe their preparedness to use research based frameworks and strategies for student teacher relationships in their classroom for students identified with and emotional disability. Jody, Mary, Jen, Emma, Chris and Jack all stated that personal experience of working with students identified with an emotional disability makes them feel prepared to do their job. Chris shared that he is finding that he relies heavily on his past teaching experience to prepare himself to use frameworks and strategies in his classroom. Jack stated that he feels most prepared with strategies for implementing student-teacher relationships because connecting with students is a natural skill for him. Jody expressed how important her years of experience are because she finds it to be the most valuable tool when implementing strategies for creating and maintain relationships with her students.
Interview Question 15 asked participants to describe the availability of materials and resources for student teacher relationships within their school concerning research based frameworks and strategies for teaching students identified with an emotional disability. Mary and Emma both stated that resources may be made available to them if they ask for them. Jody, Lisa, Jen, Jack and Chris all stated that materials and resources range from non-existent to minimal and that they are not readily available. Jody shared that in her years of teaching in the same district, she does not recall any materials or resources that were targeted for student-teacher relationships when teaching students identified as ED. Donna expressed that she is not aware of any tangible materials available to her. Donna continued that available resources might be considered school personnel such as the district’s Board Certified Behavioral Anylist, or special education teachers.

**Emergent Themes**

The eight interviews conducted in this study produced 1,946 lines of data to code and analyze. Over six hours of semi structured interview transcripts were coded to help identify themes of the perceptions of public K-12 general education teachers using research based frameworks and strategies for students identified with an emotional disability. To identify themes for this study, the researcher looked for repeated codes to help identify the themes (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2018), repetition is the most common technique to identify themes. Three themes emerged from these codes. These themes include, (1) self-identified teaching barriers, (2) the importance of knowing students in their environment, and (3) differentiation for students with an emotional disability.

**Theme 1: Self-Identified Teaching Barriers**
From the coding of the interview transcripts, the first theme that emerged was self-identified teaching barriers. All participants communicated in their interviews that there were academic and classroom management challenges as well as student teacher relationship challenges that were presented in the general education classroom when teaching students identified with an emotional disability. All participants proposed that a major impact to teaching and learning was the lack of time. Mary, Jen, and Jack all shared their perception that curriculum pacing guides in their district are not realistic. The pacing guides do not have built in time for teachers to circle back to content that was not understood. Jack stated, “In my experience when teaching students with an emotional disability they can easily fall behind because of behaviors that distract them from their academic or leaving the classroom for breaks and missing instruction”. Emma and Chris both shared that students with emotional disabilities in their classrooms often cannot keep up with rigorous pacing guides set forth by the school district. All participants stated that there were barriers in the general education classroom that impact the teaching of students identified with and emotional disability. These barriers included the ability for general education teachers to have instructional flexibility, the ability to build positive rapports with students, and the lack of consistency and support in the general education setting for teaching students identified with an emotional disability in the general education classroom.

Subtheme 1: Instructional Flexibility

Instructional flexibility in the classroom allows for teachers to set their own pace or rhythm with the curriculum based on student engagement and academic achievement, as described by Jen in her semi structured interview. Mary spoke to the importance of a positive, growth mindset that general education teachers need to have while working with an emotionally diverse population of students. Six of the participants, Jody, Mary, Jen, Emma, Lisa, and Chris
expressed the importance of teachers having flexibility in their teaching practices. Jen shared that it is important for general education teachers to have the ability to remain flexible with the way that they can present curriculum content and assess for understanding to optimize student engagement within their classrooms. Mary stated,

It is important to have the time to be flexible when teaching students with an emotional disability. You need to have the flexibility to first make sure that the student is emotionally stable and available for learning before introducing academics.

Two participants, Jen and Mary who are not core content general education teachers (i.e. technology teacher, music teachers, etc.), discussed the shift from standard based learning to skill-based learning and how that shift made it easier to work with an emotional diverse population in the general education setting. Mary said that students are now able demonstrate learning in a very individualized way, which contributed to fewer academic challenges within their classrooms when teaching students with an emotional disability. Jen stated that skill based learning enables her students to choose the way they would like to present their understanding of a topic in a way that they are comfortable with, which increases their level of engagement. Jen shared, “When you have the flexibly to get creative with content delivery, assignments or assessments it’s much more engaging for the students”.

Jen and Jack discussed curriculum content restrictions when it comes teaching students with an emotional disability. Jen discussed how there are curriculum modifications in student IEP’s that restrict the teaching of specific topics which then isolates the student because they are given an independent alternative assignment to complete. Three participants, Jen, Jack, and Lisa shared that they found it difficult to keep up with the different accommodations and modifications that students with emotional disabilities have in the general education classroom.
Jen shared, “I had a student whose IEP modification documented that the mental health unit in the curriculum is a restricted topic”. Jody discussed how she has a student who had an accommodation that said, purposeful partnering for projects. She continued how this became an issue when the student did not want to be in a partnership especially one that was predetermined.

According to the participants, Mary, Jen, and Jack, shared that they work in school districts that use curriculum-pacing guides. Jody defined curriculum pacing guides as a schedule that provides predetermined dates for lessons, start and end dates for units, and assessment due dates for data collection. Three participants, Mary, Jody, and Jack, spoke about the unrealistic timeline for teaching a diverse student population within the general education classroom. Jack shared that these dates not only put pressure on the teachers, but he has also experienced his students feeling lost and falling behind which has caused frustration. These same three participants spoke to the concern of the time constraints the curriculum pacing guide sets forth to be unrealistic. Jody stated that she feels as though administrators have prescribed her days and the team who put the curriculum pacing guide together did not consider the variation of ability of students into account. Jody expressed, “teaching and learning is not one size fits all, some lessons might take a few days for students to fully grasp and be ready to move on” Mary, Lisa, Emma, and Chris also shared their experiences with the importance of checking in with students and see where they are emotionally before introducing a new academic topic. Emma stated that “If students are not emotionally sound then they are likely not available to learn academics”. Lisa shared, “it’s hard when they’re not able to complete the work because of whatever emotionality it is that is impacting them, so it’s important to find the time to check in with the student so that they can be successful”. 
All participants expressed concern during the semi-structured interviews that they have experienced a lack of non-academic time spent with their students identified with ED. Donna shared that time is the biggest challenge she faces in the classroom when it comes to teaching students with ED. She continued that “I need extra time to get to know the student, the student needs extra time to regulate themselves before I can start teaching and there isn’t extra time for either of those things.” Emma suggested that it would be helpful if there was time built into schedules for checking in with students. Lisa has experienced wrapping up a lesson and moving on knowing that a student with ED was not available for academics because they were emotionally unsteady at that time.

Subtheme 2: Building Positive Rapports with Students

General education teachers who participated in this study have all experienced that in order for students with an emotional disability to engage in their academics and follow classroom expectations they need to have a solid foundation of positive rapport building. Participants expressed that building positive rapports with students takes time, and it begins with understanding their background. Chris shared that he likes to learn a little bit about his students before he meets them. He continued that he has sought out his previous general education teacher to hear what worked and did not work for them. Lisa and Emma both described that students with emotional disabilities need to feel heard, understood, and validated in order to feel comfortable in their environment and available to engage in their academic learning. Lisa expressed that relationships need to come first with students identified with an emotional disability. She said, “It’s important to listen to the student and make sure that they feel heard, and validate their feelings”. Participants all expressed that relationship building can only happen if there is enough time built into their daily classroom routines and schedules to listen to students.
needs by engage in conversations with students. Chris stated, “One of my biggest challenges
with rapport building is the time it takes. What are my other 22 students doing while I’m
devoting my attention to my one student with ED?” Jody shared that she feels the only way to
provide the time to build relationships with students is to lessen the academic rigor. Donna said
that she feels “it’s nearly impossible in an elementary school setting to devote blocks of time to
one student”.

Four of the participants, Lisa, Mary, Jen, and Chris, discussed the challenges around
building a healthy relationship with students. The barriers mentioned were power struggles,
setting boundaries, taking behaviors personally, and not having the skills or special education
background to understand the disability. Lisa has experienced a power struggle between herself
and her student with ED in the past. She said, “Experience has taught me where I can give a little
and this allows the student with ED to feel a piece of control which is what I’ve experienced they
needed”. Mary and Lisa found it difficult to set boundaries with students identified with an
emotional disability and Lisa described the relationship as, “Black and white, either filled with
trust and what feels like friendship or no trust and a superior/inferior relationship. Finding the
middle ground takes a lot of time and understanding of the disability which we simply don’t have
time for,” stated Lisa. Jen discussed how difficult it is not to take some of the behaviors,
aggressions, and comments personally. She shared, that when a student has acted out it felt as
though it was a reflection of something she has done and this was a challenge for her to move
past. Jody, Jen, Donna, and Chris have found students with an emotional disability to be very
reactive and difficult to talk to when there is a situation. Chris stated, “Since there is not time
built into schedules for relationship building, the behaviors, aggression and comments are not
addressed or problem-solved, which can leave teachers feeling angry and/or hurt”.
Lastly, participants Jody, Mary, Jen, Donna, and Chris stated that they do not feel equipped with the proper skills, training or background to understand what, an emotional disability is, and how they can better support students with an emotional disability in the general education classroom. Chris shared that he is an elementary school teacher and does not have the same educational background as a special education teacher. He said, “Sometimes it feels like trial and error because I don’t have the training that I probably should to teach students with an emotional disability”. Jody stated that she feels as though when situations arise in the general education classroom there should be support staff there to step in so they can continue teaching the rest of the students in the classroom with minimal disruptions. Donna explained that she has learning what an emotional disability is, however, it can look different from student-to-student, which makes understanding the disability and supporting the student challenging.

**Subtheme 3: Lack of consistency and support for students in the general education classroom**

Participants Jody, Lisa, Donna, and Chris discussed their concerns regarding the lack of consistency with support for teaching students with an emotional disability in the general education classroom. Jody stated that she has experienced a lack of paraprofessional support in her classroom. She explained that support staff are assigned to the classroom to assist with academic support and are not consistently available. Donna expressed that the paraprofessionals are often pulled to cover in other areas of the building and sometimes it is not the same support staff working in their classroom, which impacts the relationship between the staff and student. Jody spoke about IEP’s being violated due to lack of consistency of paraprofessional support in the classroom. Jody said, “I’ve felt angry and frustrated for my unsupported student in my classroom, how are they supposed to be successful when they don’t have the support they require available to them?” Chris, Jody, and Donna discussed the lack of support to follow student IEP’s,
leaving these general education participant teachers feeling unprepared for teaching students with emotional disabilities in their classrooms.

All participants shared that personal experience is what contributes to them feeling prepared to use frameworks and strategies in the general education classroom when working with students identified with an emotional disability. Donna, Jack, Chris, and Jody stated that meaningful professional development is lacking greatly in their school district. These four participants said that they have had no formal training on frameworks and strategies for teaching students with an emotional disability. Jody, Jen, and Emma also stated that they are self-taught when implementing strategies and frameworks in the classroom. Jody and Jen stated that they have actually used Google to search for strategies to use in their classrooms.

All participants stated that if there are resources they are not readily available to the teaching staff. Jody and Jack stated that because of budget restrictions tangible resources are very limited within their district. Jody said that the budget for special education students goes to special education teachers making it difficult for general education teachers to access resources. Mary and Emma stated that if they ask for resources, they are likely to get them, the challenge is knowing what resources to ask for.

**Theme 2: Knowing Students in their Environment**

All participants shared that knowing your students is important when it comes to using frameworks and strategies in the general education setting for students identified with an emotional disability. The frameworks and strategies that were discussed by the eight participants in this study include setting expectations, making connections through respect and trust, and good communication and collaboration with the school-based team and families.

**Subtheme 1: Setting Expectations**
Four participants, Jack, Chris, Donna, and Emma shared that having clear expectations is helpful for all students in the classroom. These four participants also stated that it is important for teachers to uphold their expectations to maximize student learning and managing the classroom. “Posting visuals and giving examples of expectations is practiced daily”, said Jack. Jack, Chris, and Donna stated that having classroom routines for both academics and behavior is something they practice daily, and they found that the consistency of routines maximizes academic engagement. Donna said, “Having clear expectations that are continuously communicated and reviewed helps the class run smoothly”. She also shared that in addition to reviewing the expectations with the whole class, she also gives reminders to a student in her class with ED separately. Chris stated that during their morning meeting, when the class comes together to go over the schedule he uses this time to review expectations with the whole class. Chris shared that he taped writing expectations inside the front cover of his students’ writing notebook so that the student had an additional individualized visual reminder of what is expected.

**Subtheme 2: Making Connections**

All participants stated that building a relationship with your students is important. Two participants, Jody and Lisa, shared that they refer to IEP’s and talk with colleagues who also have or have had the same student to find out background information and hope to find helpful strategies that have been successful in the past. Jen shared, “I use my collaborative learning time (CLT) to meet with my students’ case managers so I can better understand ways to connect with students, because sometimes it can feel impossible or be difficult”. Jody stated that when students arrived to her class in the morning, she greeted each student, addressed them by name and asked one open-ended question. Emma and Jen both expressed that they look to find the
students strengths and challenges, and knowing what the strengths and challenges are better prepares them for individualized lesson planning for that student. Jen stated, “Knowing your student may help you predict how they will behave in various academic settings across their school day”. Jen also stated, “Knowing your student’s strengths and challenges may help to deescalate situations and become a proactive teacher instead of being reactive in certain situations”. Mary stated that having connections and conversations with students is very important. Mary also shared “when you are familiar with a student you learn their activators or triggers which makes it easier to help them though situations in the moment”. Jen explained, “Connecting with a student allows you to understand them, and this enables you to meet them where they are both emotionally and academically that month, week, day and or moment”. Emma said, “When I have connections with my students I can read their body language and I know how they are feeling without words, which I know some of my students appreciate”.

**Subtheme 3: Communication and Collaboration**

All eight participants shared that communication is important when teaching students with an emotional disability in the general education classroom. Five participants Emma, Jack, Jen, Mary, and Donna discussed communication with the special education teacher and/or families as an effective strategy. Jen shared how she collaborates with other service providers that her student worked with to better support her student. Donna said that she emails families at least weekly to communicate something positive that the student with ED did in her class. Jen and Jack expressed that they often looked to the special education teacher to gain a better understanding of student profiles before meeting their student. Jack said, “Because my classroom is a gymnasium and can look a little chaotic. I need to know ahead of time if there are any triggers, like loud music, bouncing basketballs, so that I can be proactive”. Jen, Donna, and Jack
all discussed their collaboration with the special education teacher or specialist when identifying strategies for managing behavior and academic instruction. Jody and Lisa both mentioned that it is important to understand and follow the student’s IEP or behavior support plan if they have one. Lisa said, “Sometimes it’s a little extra work to follow a behavior support plan but the consistency is important”. Donna, Chris, and Jen stated that they use collaborative meeting times to discuss individual students and best teaching practices. They also use this time to share what strategies they have found effective and what challenges they continue to face after implementing suggested strategies in the classroom.

**Theme 3: Differentiation for Students with an Emotional Disability**

All participants stated that Universal Design for Learning is a natural part of their teaching practices. Differentiation in the general education classroom is an important strategy to ensure academic success of their students (Griful-Freixenet et al., 2021). All participants shared that purposeful planning for all students and consistency in practice is part of their teaching practices.

**Subtheme 1: Purposeful Planning**

All participants shared that planning is an important piece of academic instruction. Jody and Chris both said that through purposeful planning they differentiate their instruction by incorporating instructional choice. Instructional choice allows the student to choose the method in which they feel they can be the most engaged and optimize their learning (Ennis, 2020). Participants shared that they felt instructional choice gives a student identified with an emotional disability a sense of power in their academic decision-making. Mary stated that she continuously updated her lesson planning in the moment as well as daily according the way students are responding to content delivery. She also shared, “If I have a student who did not understand a
concept I need to adjust my next steps and plan purposefully”. Jody, Chris, and Donna discussed the use of grouping students and differentiating the teaching method by groups. Chris shared that grouping allows him to present the content in a variety of ways and allows the students to demonstrate understanding in a variety of different ways. Donna expressed that she uses grouping so that she can target specific students and give them a second round of direct instruction. Emma and Chris shared that they engage students through interest, discovering the students’ interest and then integrating it into their learning. Emma said, “Everything circles back to knowing your students, the more you know then the better you can plan for them” Chris explained how he changes character names in his read aloud to student names and this drew their attention. He also shared that when he created writing models he chooses topics that he knew his student had an interest in”. Jack, Jody, and Jen expressed that they displayed the learning objective prior to beginning the class and the participants discussed how this helps their students prepare mentally for the lesson and is a proactive strategy. Jen shared,

I’ve had students with ED tell me that having the objectives posted helps minimize their anxiety. I think they are better able to cope with the academic challenges when they know ahead of time what they’ll be working on and what’s expected of them.

**Subtheme 2: Teaching and Learning Consistency**

All participants discussed that they believe students should have coping skills to get through their school day. Lisa and Mary shared their perception as high school general education teachers that students should already have the skills they need to cope and be able to apply them independently. Mary shared that she believes it is important to know what strategies work for which students so that in a secondary setting all teachers and help support the student by being consistent. These participants also shared that they do not teach coping skills in their classroom
and they expect students to be able to regulate their emotions throughout their day. Lisa described her expectation that her student identified with ED at the secondary level should be able to access a pre-taught strategy while remaining in the classroom. Donna and Chris both stated that social emotional teaching and learning are important skills for students to have and they collaborate with the special education teacher to implement the teaching a variety of skills that students can access when they are feeling emotionally dysregulated. Chris shared that “social emotional teaching and learning should be taught and reinforced across all academic environments to optimize student success in the general education classroom”. He continued to share that a student in his class with ED is still so young and needed support knowing when to access a skill and needed support on how to implement the skill to regulate emotions.

The three main barriers identified by the participants included the lack of ability for general education teachers to have instructional flexibility, the lack of time to build positive rapports with students, and the lack of consistency and support in the general education setting for teaching students identified with an emotional disability in the general education classroom. The participants have implemented frameworks and strategies to address the barriers identified when working with students with an emotional disability in the general education classroom.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of public K-12 general education teachers with research-based frameworks and strategies for students in the classroom who are identified with an emotional disability. Eight participants participated in semi structured interviews that provided the participants an active voice for others to listen to their experiences teaching students with ED in the general education classroom. The semi structured interviews were coded, and themes were derived from the
responses of all eight participants of the study. Emergent themes were developed to best outline the experiences of these teachers who participated in the study. When teaching students with an emotional disability, the participants experienced barriers with academic and classroom management as well as student-teacher relationships. After analysis, three themes emerged and they were (1) self-identified teaching barriers in the general education classroom, (2) the importance of knowing students in their environment, and (3) differentiation for students with an emotional disability.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The Individuals with Disabilities Educational Act (2004), requires and expects teachers to use research-based teaching frameworks and strategies when teaching all special education students, with or without and emotional disability (ED) (Zarate & Maggin, 2021). Academic management for teaching students with ED is a critical area of practice that has not yet been fully developed by large-scale research (Vannest et al., 2011). This study provided a thorough review of a variety of academic management frameworks and strategies that are used by general education teachers who teach and support students with ED (Bergsmann et al., 2015; Cook, 2017; Ennis, 2020; Griful-Freixenet et al., Hill & Jones, 2018; 2021; Lane et al., 2018; Morris et al., 2021; Rudenstine et al., 2017). Also, research-based classroom management frameworks and strategies such as Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) may equip general education teachers with a framework to manage a classroom that blends both general education students with students identified with ED (Barns & McCallops, 2019; Esen-Aygun et al., 2017; Gaias et al., 2019; Hunter 2017; McCormick 2015; Neth, et al., 2019). In addition, student-teacher relationship frameworks and strategies may support the importance of positive relationships between students and their teachers (Johnston et al., 2022). Teacher expectations may be associated with student academic achievement and by using prescribed student-teacher relationship frameworks and strategies in the classroom, general education teachers can better support students with ED (Bettini, 2020; Bierman, 2021; Caldarella et al., 2019; Johnston et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2021; Morgan et al., 2015; Scanlon, 2020).

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of public K-12 general education teachers with research-based frameworks and strategies for students in the classroom who are identified with an emotional disability. Semi
structured interviews were utilized to gather data to help answer the research questions which were focused on general education teachers describing their lived experiences with using research-based frameworks and strategies for teaching students with and emotional disability. Once all eight interviews were completed, transcribed, and checked for accuracy by participants the transcripts were coded to find emergent themes. The themes that emerged from the data collected described K-12 general teachers' lived experiences while teaching students with an emotional disability in the general education classroom. Based on the coding process, the following emergent themes were identified: (1) self-identified teaching barriers in the general education classroom, (2) the importance of knowing students in their environment, and (3) the need for differentiation for students with an emotional disability. This chapter provides an interpretation of the findings, which guide in answering the three outlined research questions, as well as the implications of this study and recommendations for action and further study.

Bloomberg and Volpe (2018) state that Chapter 5, the conclusion, provides concluding statements and recommendations that flow directly from the findings of the study. Additionally, Bloomberg and Volpe (2018) claim that conclusions are “assertions based on your finds and must therefore be warranted by the findings” (p. 271).

**Interpretation and Importance of Findings**

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2018) qualitative research starts with questions, “and its ultimate purpose is learning” (p. 233). Interpretation is an intuitive process, and not mechanical or technical (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). This section outlines the interpretations and important findings for each of the research questions that guided this study.
Research Question One

Research Question One, “How do public K-12 general education teachers describe the use of research-based academic management frameworks and strategies in the general education classroom for students identified with an emotional disability?” was created to explore and understand the lived experiences of general education teachers use of academic management strategies. According to Ennis et al., (2020) using effective research based instructional strategies may increase academic and social engagement and avoid academic and social failure in the general education classroom. All eight participants have taught or currently teach a student identified with an emotional disability in the general education classroom and shared their experiences. The participants in this study provided evidence to explain that there were challenges with academic management when teaching students identified with an emotional disability. Participants shared frameworks and strategies that they use to management these challenges along with their perceived sense of preparedness to teach students with an emotional disability and the accessibility to relevant materials and resources for academic management in the general education classroom when teaching students identified with an emotional disability. These frameworks include Universal Design Instruction, differentiated instruction, instructional choice, and competency based instruction.

Teaching students with an emotional disability in the general education classroom illuminated that teaching is not one size fits all especially when it comes to teaching students with an emotional disability, according to the participants in this study. General education teachers need more flexibility with the way they implement a timeline for curriculum, the way they teach and the way they assess when teaching students with an emotional disability, according to the participants. Participants shared that they find it to be difficult for students
identified with an emotional disability to manage and complete academic work that moves at a predetermined pace. Mary stated that her academic management challenges when working with students with an emotional disability stem from her inability to be flexible with teaching curriculum. Mary, Donna and Emma all expressed concern with unrealistic expectations of keeping up with the curriculum, the inability for teachers to be flexible with teaching the curriculum, and students with ED falling behind on the district’s academic pacing guide.

Building positive relationships with students has been a baseline strategy for academic management in the general education classroom according to the participants. Emma, Jack, Donna and Chris all expressed concern with the lack of time they have to build relationships with students identified with an emotional disability. Lack of time to get to know the students is a big academic management challenge according to the participants. Teaching and learning styles can be developed and implemented when a teacher understands how a student learns best, and it takes time to develop a comprehensive understanding of the way a complex learner, learns best (Carrington et al., 2020). The Universal Design Learning (UDL) framework has three guiding principles that guide educators to support all learners by providing multiple ways of engaging students, representing knowledge, and demonstrating understanding (Carrington et al., 2020). Universal Design Learning supports the participants statements that it is important to have the time to get to know students so that teachers are able to actively engage students and provide them with the opportunity to represent their knowledge and demonstrate understating in a way that it best for the individual student.

Students with an emotional disability also need to have consistent support with their academics in the general education classroom (Cook, 2017). Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) are created by a team and require a team in implemented the goals, objectives,
accommodations and modifications that can be found within an IEP (IDEA, 2004). The need for consistent support for teaching students with an emotional disability was apparent in the participant interviews. The participants in this study found that building a positive foundational relationship with students who have ED is essential for academic management. In order to maintain those relationships and open to pathways for academic management and learning, participants described that the support staff such as paraprofessional needs to be the same personnel to maintain consistency. For teachers and support staff to appropriately implement IEP modifications and accommodations staff who work with these students need to be consistent. Jody, Chris, and Jen all stated that consistency is a challenge when it comes to academic management. Jody said that support staff who are unfamiliar with a student are unable to be successful when supporting students with an emotional disability for several reasons. This includes students not wanting to work with someone new or different and the staff not being knowledgeable about how to effectively support the student without the teacher taking time to review strategies and give background information.

Participants in this study shared that making personal connections with students may enable the general education teacher to identify students’ strengths and challenges and then through purposeful lesson planning, enhance these strengths and address the student’s challenges. Universal Design Learning (UDL) is a reached-based instructional framework that enables students to build and maintain relationships, exhibit appropriate behaviors, and demonstrate academic achievement (Cook, 2017). Once teachers know their student they can begin connecting with them through the academic content by providing relativity in their lessons that can increase student engagement and interest (Cook, 2017).
Quality interactions, clear expectations, positive reinforcement, and non-punitive punishments may also help build academic engagement and social-emotional stabilization within the classroom (Bierman, 2021). Clear expectations set students with ED up for academic success in the general education classroom, students know the rules and expectations before walking through the door. Participants, Jack, Donna and Chris all shared that they use the strategy of creating and communicating clear expectations to address academic management challenges in their classrooms. Jack stated that he provides visuals for behavioral and academic expectations; he also emphasizes routines and expectations to help minimize behaviors that disrupt the academic learning process. Donna shared that she has her students review expectations during her morning announcement meetings daily. She believes that having her students review the expectations and provide real time examples of the expectations helps them internalize the expectations rather than her reciting rules to the students. Chris elaborated on how he sets clear expectations by sharing that he provides positive reinforcement such as, students being able to earn tickets to a prize box in his classroom following classroom expectations. For example, if a student independently transitions from one subject or setting to another without interruption and follows classroom rules and expectations the student can earn a ticket. The student can save tickets and then “cash” them in for a prize at the end of the week.

Another research-based framework that participants in this study use in the general education classroom for teaching students identified with an emotional disability is Differentiated instruction (DI). Differentiated Instruction has three core principles: (1) differences in student readiness, which is the “what” in learning, (2) differences in learning profiles which is the “how” in learning, and (3) differences in student interest which is the “why” in learning (Griful-Freixenet et al., 2021). General education teachers from this study
implemented differentiated instruction into their lesson planning in response to academic management challenges. All eight participants use differentiation when teaching students with an emotional disability in the general education classroom. Chris shared that he regularly uses flexible grouping when teaching. He groups his students based on a pre-assessment given before the start of each teaching unit. Mary shared that she differentiates her lesson and assessments based on student need or ability. Jody explained that uses Differentiated Instruction by identifying learning differences by examining student’s personal and academic strengths and challenges and then builds lessons based on learning profiles. Lisa stated that she incorporates her students IEP accommodations to help differentiate her lessons for students who are identified with an emotional disability. Jen shared that she often groups her students based on preferred learning style, for example, she will have a group of student learning curriculum content by watching videos and viewing illustrations, while another group of students has manipulatives and is problem solving with tangible resources to gain knowledge of a particular concept. Emma uses project based learning techniques as part of differentiated learning for her students, she explained that most of her students with ED perform better when they are fully immersed in hands-on projects where they can display their learning. Jack stated that utilizing group or partner work to differentiate his instruction is used most commonly in his classroom for academic management. Donna explained that she puts in a lot of time to her lesson planning to make sure that her lesson can reach a variety of learners that she has in her general education classroom. She differentiates her lessons by using task stations and modifying those stations as students move around the room from one station task to the next.

Instructional choice is a research-based strategy that increases time on task and behavior and has a positive impact on students with ED in the mainstream classroom (Lane et al., 2018).
Jody explained that she often uses instructional choice in her classroom when teaching students with an emotional disability. She shared that when she implements instructional choice she offers a student two different learning activities to choose from, she finds that this increases academic engagements and task completion in her classroom. Jen shared a similar experience using instructional choice in her classroom. She offers a choice board of ways to demonstrate knowledge at the end of a teaching unit. Students are able to choose to show their understanding in a way that they are most comfortable. Competency based education is the strategy of teaching, assessing, grading and reporting on students based on their ability to demonstrate specific skills set throughout their learning (Bergsmann et al., 2015). Jen, Emma, and Jack all expressed that moving from standard based instruction to skill or competency based education has helped students with ED in the general education classroom increase their academic engagement and time on task. Competency based education allows students to move through the curriculum at their own pace and demonstrate understanding in their own way (Bergsmann et al., 2015).

Professional development, resources, and collaboration are important components to the implementation process of frameworks and strategies (Berry, 2021; State et al., 2019; Talida et al., 2019). Seven out of the eight participants shared that they have not had any formal training on academic management when teaching students identified with and emotional disability. Research has shown there is an insufficient number of teachers who have had quality training on addressing the unique needs of students identified with ED (Davis, 2021). Seven of the eight participants stated that they feel a sense of preparedness due to their past teaching experiences. Jen and Jack both shared that they also rely on their collaboration with special education teachers when it comes to academic management and teaching students with an emotional disability. Lisa stated that she is willing to attend professional development opportunities, and is on board with
implementing newly learned strategies for teaching students with an emotional disability should she be presented with the opportunity to do so.

Participants of this study described the use of research-based academic management frameworks and strategies in the general education classroom for students identified with an emotional disability as using multiple frameworks such as, Universal Design Learning, Differentiated Instruction, instructional choice and competency based learning in their classroom. Participants described using strategies to address academic management such as, building positive relationships, having clear expectations, and providing consistent support for students with emotional disabilities. Rather than a single strategy, most participants described the use of a combinations of researcher based frameworks and strategies to address academic management in their general education classroom.

**Research Question Two**

Research Question Two, “How do public K-12 general education teachers describe the use of research-based classroom management frameworks and strategies in the general education classroom for students identified with an emotional disability?” was created to explore and understand the lived experiences of general education teachers use of classroom management frameworks and strategies that were research-based. Classroom management systems and frameworks may increase student success by creating an orderly learning environment that enhances students’ academic skills and competencies, as well as their behavioral and social emotional development (Bierman, 2021; Gaias et al., 2019; Hill & Jones, 2018; Rogers, 2019; Simonsen et al., 2022). The participants of this study explained that there were challenges with classroom management when teaching students identified with an emotional disability. Participants shared frameworks and strategies that they used to manage these challenges along
with their perceived sense of preparedness to teach students with an emotional disability and the accessibility to relevant materials and resources for classroom management in the general education classroom when teaching students identified with an emotional disability.

Inclusion for students identified with ED creates a culture where all students can access and participate in academic content and social connections (Brix et al., 2022). Managing an inclusive general education classroom that has student(s) identified with an emotional disability is challenging. Chris shared that when teaching a single lesson there are so many different needs to manage while teaching and it can get complicated. Jody shared that one emotional event can impact the entire classroom’s learning environment and change the dynamics of the room. Mary spoke to the interruptions being a challenge in her classroom.

Inconsistencies have also been a challenge for many participants. The inconsistencies include varying support staff working with students, lack of support staff to work with students, lack of familiarization to be able to implement behavior support plans, and individualized education plans appropriately and with fidelity. Jody shared that in her classroom she often has different paraprofessionals rotated through her class. This causes a disruption in teaching when Jody needs to share and discuss the students IEP or behavior plan in addition to review the lesson plans so that the support staff is able to support the student effectively. Jody also shared that sometimes her school is short staffed, and her students are left unsupported which also causes a disruption of teaching and learning. Lisa stated that her students can become noncompliant with staff they are unfamiliar with, this presents as a problem when support staff is not consistent for her students with an emotional disability. Donna also explained that it becomes more of a disruption to classroom management when support staff is inconsistent or null. She continued that it is important for her students with an emotional disability to have consistent support staff
working in the classroom so that they are already familiar with expectations and student challenges.

Distractions within the school setting have proven to be a classroom management challenge for general education teachers in this study. Jen mentioned that technology for her students with ED, such as phones, are hard to compete with when the student is already disinterested in the academic topic. Chris shared that outside his classroom window is the playground and he has noticed that his student with ED has increased behaviors during the time there are students outside using the playground equipment. Jack shared that when he teaches health in a different classroom often there is visual stimulation on the walls and hanging from the ceiling that distracts his students with ED.

A research-based framework teaches students how to manage their emotional and behavioral difficulties when struggles arise in the general education classroom such as inconsistencies and distractions. Social-emotional teaching and learning have had positive effects on students who have displayed emotional and behavioral difficulties (McCormick, 2015). Participants in this study have experienced that building positive classroom routines and relationships with students directly impacts classroom management as a whole. Building positive relationships and connecting with students develops a sense of community in the classroom for students with an emotional disability (Rogers, 2019). Knowing your students and understanding their antecedents is the precursor to effective classroom management (Simonsen et al., 2022). Keeping relational pedagogy in trauma informed practices at the forefront of educational minds, gives researchers the ability to provide educators with effective strategies to bridge the gap and create an environment where students can feel safe and build trusting relationships with their teachers (Morgan et al., 2015).
When working with students who have an emotional disability or have experienced trauma, allowing time to build safe trusting relationships and taking the time needed during their learning is an important understanding for trauma informed practices (Morgan et al., 2015). Creating an environment that feels safe and welcoming is a strategy that participants Jen and Jack implement in their classrooms. Jen and Jack both expressed that the environment of their classroom is important to them, from the way the classroom is arranged to how they decorate the bulletin boards is all carefully thought out. The teachers’ interactions and classroom management routines play a significant role in managing students with ED (Bierman, 2021). Creating and maintaining classroom routines provides structure and consistency for students. The participants in this study shared that their students who are identified with ED often thrive in environments where structure and consistency are provided creating a safe and welcoming learning environment for students.

Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) is a widely adopted prevention framework for improving social, emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes for all students (Simonsen et al., 2022). Donna shared that the framework PBIS has previously been implemented in her school district. However, due to lack of “buy-in” by the school community, the implementation of this framework slowly dissipated. Donna stated that each of the elementary schools in her district had PBIS coaches and leaders who were trained on this particular framework to improve social, emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes of their student population. Donna shared that some teachers, including her, still use pieces of the framework in their general education classroom for their classroom management. Donna had previously shared that building a positive rapport with her students identified with an emotional disability was an effective strategy that she puts into practice. The PBIS framework states that knowing your students and understanding their
antecedents is the precursor to effective classroom management (Simonsen et al., 2022). The PBIS framework also encompasses strategies to prevent the challenges that participants described when asked about classroom management challenges they have while teaching students with an emotional disability in a general education classroom. While Chris had stated that managing many different types of needs in his classroom is challenging, the PBIS framework establishes being able to move seamlessly throughout the classroom allowing teachers to actively supervise, engage with students, and is an effective teaching method (Simonsen et al., 2022). Jack discussed his use of clear expectations when managing his classroom. Behavioral expectations are especially important for students with ED (Hunter, 2017). Jack follows PBIS framework by posting visuals of classroom expectations as reminders and reviews expectations with his students daily. Procedures and rules should be posted, taught, reviewed, and enforced within the mainstream classroom according to the PBIS framework (Simonsen et al., 2022). These clearly articulated procedures and rules can be presented to provide behavior supports for students to be successful behaviorally and academically (Hunter, 2017).

Participants described the use of research-based classroom management frameworks and strategies in the general education classroom for students identified with an emotional disability as using multiple frameworks such as, Positive Behavior Intervention Supports, Social Emotional Learning and Trauma Informed Practices in their classroom. Participants used strategies to address classroom management such as, building positive relationships, having clear expectations, and providing consistent support, and eliminating distractions for students with emotional disabilities. Participants described their use research-based frameworks and strategies to address classroom management in their general education classroom as multi-facet, using either a combination or multiple frameworks and strategies simultaneously.
Research Question Three

Research Question 3, “How do public K-12 general education teachers describe the use of research-based student-teacher relationships frameworks and strategies in the general education classroom for students identified with an emotional disability?” was created to explore and understand the lived experiences of general education teachers use of student-teacher relationship frameworks and strategies. Research shows that effective teachers build positive healthy relationships with students (Bierman, 2021). The participants of this study explained that there were challenges with student teacher relationships when teaching students identified with an emotional disability. Participants shared frameworks and strategies that they used to manage these challenges along with their perceived sense of preparedness to teach students with an emotional disability and the accessibility to relevant materials and resources for academic management in the general education classroom when teaching students identified with an emotional disability.

Quality interactions, clear expectations, positive reinforcement, and non-punitive punishments may help build academic engagement and social-emotional stabilization within the classroom (Bierman, 2021). In order to have quality interactions with students, teachers need time to connect and interact with their students. Jody shared that she feels her days are “prescribed” and that there is not time build into her day to get to know her students. Her district provides a pacing calendar for curriculum and breaks down units into lesson, which have corresponding dates in which lesson and units need to be completed by. She feels as though if she was able to have a more flexible schedule she would be able to created time to have quality interactions and connect with her students. Teachers who demonstrate traits of being warm and sensitive have shown to be effective with teaching students with ED (Bierman, 2021). Jody, Jen,
Emma, Jack, Donna and Chris all explained that lack of time to connect with their students is a concern. Quality interactions are genuine connections between students and teachers and it takes time to build trust and respect to truly understand students’ individual needs and triggers (Bierman, 2021).

Creating positive relationships between students and teachers was a practice described by the participants. Participants in the study reported that they praised their students identified with an emotional disability as a strategy to keep their student actively engaged. Mary reported that she uses praise constantly in her classroom to help boost confidence in her students with both behavior and academics expectations. Using praise to reach students with ED is an effective strategy that teachers have used and can continue to use to bridge the success for students in mainstream classes (Caldarella et al., 2019). Jody shared that she uses praise with students in her classroom as a strategy for building a positive relationships between herself and her students. Jody said that the more she uses praise the more confidence it gives her students, which helps to support their positive relationship. Students who have teachers who practice high praise to reprimand ratios demonstrate lower levels of noncompliance and higher levels of prosocial skills, engagement, enthusiasm and focus (Gewertz, 2020).

Communication is a strategy that the participants in this study are also using to help manage their relationships with students. The communication comes in all forms and has many different paths, for example, teacher to family, teacher to special education teacher, whole “team” (teacher, special education teacher, student and family), as shared by Emma. Communication can be both formal and informal. Jen shared that communication could include a formal meeting taking place to exchange information and provide updates and important information or a quick conversation in passing. Lisa, Mary, Jen, Emma and Chris all shared that
communication is their “go to” strategy managing student teacher relationships. Chris stated that when a challenge arises communication is always the first intervention, with the student, and either then with the family or school based team depending on the situation.

Teacher training and implementation of the praise to reprimand ratio strategy can significantly improve the effectiveness of teaching students with ED in mainstream classes (Gewertz, 2020). Although all eight participants in this study stated that they use praise as a strategy, none of them have been formally trained on the praise to reprimand ratio strategy. All participants shared that professional development around student teachers relationships is greatly lacking and that they would welcome any formal or informal training to better their practice when working with students identified with and emotional disability.

**Implications**

This section discusses implications aligned with the rationale and significance of this study as outlined in Chapter 1. Exploring the lived experiences of general education teachers who teach students with ED in their general education classroom addressed the central phenomenon studied. Listening to the experiences of the participants created an opportunity for the participants to share how they use research-based frameworks and strategies for academic management and classroom management, and the semi-structured interviews also provided an opportunity to understand the teacher’s or participants’ perceived effectiveness of the framework or strategy being used. Additionally, it is important to know how general education teachers perceive the student-teacher relationship frameworks and strategies that they may use in the general education classroom (Gaastra et al., 2022). This provided the researcher an understanding of the relationship between student and teacher through the implementation of a framework or strategy.
This study provided all eight participants an opportunity to share their experiences of teaching students identified with an emotional disability in the general education classroom. Each participant had a unique experience as it related to his or her academic management, classroom management, and student-teacher relationship when working with a student identified with an emotional disability. Exploring the experiences of public K-12 general education teachers who work with students identified with ED allowed them to share their understandings of the phenomenon, and describe how they used frameworks and strategies in their classrooms. Participants in this study discussed the impact of self-identified teaching barriers in the general education classroom. These barriers included, the ability for general education teachers to have instructional flexibility, the ability to build positive rapports with students, and the lack of consistency and support in the general education setting for teaching students identified with an emotional disability in the general education classroom. Participants also described the importance of knowing students in their environment. Using strategies such as setting expectations, making connections through respect and trust, and good communication and collaboration with the school-based team and families to teach students with ED. Lastly, the participants detailed the impact of differentiation for students with ED in the general education classroom using purposeful planning and maintaining consistency in the teaching practice.

Recommendations for Action

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of public K-12 general education teachers with research-based frameworks and strategies for students in the classroom who are identified with emotional disability. Participants in this study were provided a platform to share their experiences of teaching students identified with an emotional disability in the general education classroom. Data gathered from the semi-
structured interviews, literature reviewed, and the development of emergent themes provided the researcher with the opportunity to create three recommendations for action. The three recommendations are (1) general education teachers need to attend meaningful professional development focused on teaching students identified with an emotional disability, (2) provide general education teachers with flexibility in their schedules to properly develop relationships with their students who are identified with an emotional disability and (3) engagement in communication and collaboration.

**Recommendation One**

The first recommendation, based on feedback from the participants, is that general education teachers need to attend meaningful professional development around academic management for teaching students with emotional disabilities. The recommendation is for general education teachers to access professional development on frameworks and strategies for their use in the general education classroom. Teachers need to be provided with quality professional development that explains students’ disabilities in depth as well as provides research-based strategies that have been effective in mainstream classrooms for students with ED (Bettini, 2020).

During the semi-structured interviews participants shared that they have had little to no formal training on academic management strategies and frameworks. Lisa stated that she is hopeful to attend a training that can better prepare her for working with student with and emotional disability. Jody elaborated that her 14 years of teaching experience is what makes her feel somewhat prepared with academic management when teaching students with an emotional disability. She has taught many students who have been identified with ED and has learned a lot through experience and collaboration with special education teachers and support staff, however,
she would be very happy to attend a professional development and be formally trained on frameworks and strategies that she could use in her general education classroom. Professional development opportunities for general education teachers who teach students with ED could include training on the framework and implementation of Universal Design Learning. Universal Design Learning (UDL) is a reached-based instructional framework that enables students to build and maintain relationships, exhibit appropriate behaviors, and demonstrate academic achievement (Cook, 2017). Through professional development on UDL teachers can learn about the three guiding principles of UDL that guide educators to support all learners by providing multiple ways of engaging students, representing knowledge, and demonstrating understanding (Carrington et al., 2020). Teachers should also learn how to incorporate these three principles into their lesson planning.

Because classroom management systems and frameworks can increase student success by creating an orderly learning environment that enhances students’ academic skills and competencies, as well as their behavioral and social emotional development (Bierman, 2021; Gaias et al., 2019; Hill & Jones, 2018; Rogers, 2019; Simonsen et al., 2022) it is necessary for teachers to attend professional development for classroom management. It is recommended that general education teachers attend formal training on social emotional teaching and learning (SEL). Social and emotional learning (SEL) is a process where individuals can acquire the knowledge, skills, and an attitude to manage emotions, feel empathy for others, and achieve individual and collective goals (Fundamentals of SEL, 2021). General education teachers can implement the SEL framework in their classrooms when teaching students with an emotional disability to increase academic engagement and time on task. Chris has shared that he finds it difficult to manage a large classroom of young students with ranging academic and behavioral
abilities. The implementation of SEL may help his students have a collective goal of time on task and work together with their emotions to achieve their collective goal.

**Recommendation Two**

The second recommendation is to provide general education teachers with flexibility in their schedules to properly develop relationships with their students who are identified with an emotional disability. Based on the participants’ experiences, teachers need flex time built into days for relationship building and maintaining, this connection between student and teacher. Teachers who demonstrate traits of being warm, sensitive, and open to supporting all students while still maintaining a cooperative and engaging environment in the classroom have shown to be effective with teaching students with ED (Bierman, 2021).

**Recommendation Three**

The third recommendation is to provide general education teachers with time to collaborate and communicate with others. Based on the participants experiences teachers need time within their workday to collaborate appropriately to learn about their students and understand their strengths and challenges. Professional Learning Committees (PLC) are groups of educators who come together with a shared goal or interest and work together using-inquiry based strategies to better the student learning process and target specific student needs (State et al., 2019). Collaboration between general education teachers, special education teachers, related services and the family are beneficial for creating a positive student teacher relationship.

**Recommendations for Further Study**

There were limitations that may have potentially weakened and limited the scope of this study. Limitations to qualitative studies represent outside conditions that may restrict or constrain the scope of the study and the outcomes (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). This study
utilized a qualitative approach to allow participants to share their experiences related to frameworks and strategies for teaching students identified with an emotional disability. In addition, this study only included general education classroom teachers in education, there are more than just general education classroom teachers working with students identified with an emotional disability. Also, this study had only eight participants representing the general education population of teachers who teach students with ED in the general education classroom.

**Recommendation One**

Further examination of this central phenomenon could benefit from a mixed methods research approach where data collected could be reviewed and quantified about the perceptions of participants using research based frameworks and strategies when teaching students with ED. This would give a statistical way of reviewing the perceptions of teachers who teach students with ED in the general education classroom. Mixed method studies integrate both quantitative and qualitative methods to collect data and to analyze and interpret the collected information (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018).

**Recommendation Two**

It is recommended that for future phenomenological studies of exploring the lived experiences of K-12 public general education teachers with research-based frameworks and strategies for students with emotional disabilities other stakeholders from within the school community be included. School community members such as principals, special education teachers and related service teachers could be included as part of the participant pool. This would widen the population of teachers and present a more well-rounded perception of teaching students with ED in the general education classroom.

**Recommendation Three**
Lastly, the participants for this study were recruited from a social media platform, it is recommended for future studies to increase the sample size and expand the location from where the participants were recruited. Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested a sampling size between three to 15 participants, however, this study only included eight. Expanding the recruiting platforms could allow for a variety of general education teachers from different demographics with whom have different perceptions of teaching students identified with an emotional disability in the general education classroom.

Conclusion

The problem explored through this phenomenological study was focused on identifying the research-based frameworks and strategies used by general education teachers in the general education classroom, to effectively educate students who are identified as having an emotional disability (Lanterm et al., 2021; Mitchell et al., 2019; Woodcock & Woolfson, 2019; Zarate & Maggin, 2021). The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of public K-12 general education teachers with research-based frameworks and strategies for students in the classroom who are identified with emotional disability. The research questions for this study were developed and narrowed down to specifically address the problem and purpose of this study. The following questions were used to guide this study (1) How do public K-12 general education teachers describe the use of research-based academic management frameworks and strategies in the general education classroom for students identified with an emotional disability?, (2) How do public K-12 general education teachers describe the use of research-based classroom management frameworks and strategies in the general education classroom for students identified with an emotional disability?, and (3) How do public K-12 general education teachers describe the use of research-based student-teacher relationships?
frameworks and strategies in the general education classroom for students identified with an emotional disability?

The review of the literature conducted for this study focused on frameworks and strategies used to teach students with an emotional disability. Literature was presented on research based frameworks and strategies for academic management, classroom management, and student teacher relationships. This study utilized constructivist teaching/learning theory as the conceptual framework and more specifically used the sociocultural theory of cognitive development as the theoretical framework used to address the central phenomenon. Vygotsky’s (1934) sociocultural theory of cognitive development views human development as a socially mediated process were educators can teach cultural values, beliefs, and problem-solving skills through dialogue (McLeod, 2018).

Eight participants participated in semi-structured interviews that provided the participants an active voice for others to listen to their experiences teaching students with ED in the general education classroom. The semi-structured interviews were coded, and themes were derived from the responses of all eight participants of the study. Emergent themes were developed to best outline the experiences of these teachers who participated in the study. When teaching students with an emotional disability, the participants experienced barriers with academic and classroom management as well as student teacher relationships. After analysis, three themes emerged and they were (1) self-identified teaching barriers in the general education classroom, (2) the importance of knowing students in their environment, and (3) differentiation for students with an emotional disability.

Based on the findings of this study the researcher made three recommendations, (1) general education teachers need to attend meaningful professional development focused on
teaching students identified with an emotional disability, (2) provide general education teachers with flexibility in their schedules to properly develop relationships with their students who are identified with an emotional disability, and (3) engagement in communication and collaboration.
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Appendix A

Recruitment Flyer

Seeking volunteers for a doctoral dissertation research project titled, EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF PUBLIC K-12 GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS WITH RESEARCH-BASED FRAMEWORKS AND STRATEGIES FOR STUDENTS WITH EMOTIONAL DISABILITY

The problem explored through this study is focused on identifying the research-based frameworks and strategies used in the general education classroom, to effectively educate students who are identified as having an emotional disability.

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of public K-12 general education teachers with research-based frameworks and strategies for students in the classroom who are identified with emotional disability (ED).

If you meet the participation criteria for this study and are interested in participating, please review the attached Participation Information Sheet and email Denise Arnauckas, a doctoral student at the University of New England at darnauckas@une.edu to set up a zoom meeting.

Participation Criteria:
- 18 years of age or older
- Connecticut State certified K-12 general education teacher
- has worked or works with students identified as ED

Participation Information:
- 60 minute audio Zoom Interview
- seeking 8 participants
Appendix B

Participant Information Sheet

**Participant Information Sheet**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Version Date:</th>
<th>January 13, 2023</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IRB Project #:</td>
<td>0123-03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title of Project:</td>
<td>EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF PUBLIC K-12 GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS WITH RESEARCH-BASED FRAMEWORKS AND STRATEGIES FOR STUDENTS WITH EMOTIONAL DISABILITY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Investigator (PI):</td>
<td>Denise Arnauckas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PI Contact Information:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Darnauckas@une.edu">Darnauckas@une.edu</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**INTRODUCTION**

- This is a project being conducted for research purposes. Your participation is completely voluntary.
- The intent of the Participant Information Sheet is to provide you with important details about this research project.
- You are encouraged to ask any questions about this research project, now, during or after the project is complete.
- The use of the word ‘we’ in the Information Sheet refers to the Principal Investigator and/or other research staff.

**WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS PROJECT?**

The general purpose of this research project is to explore the lived experiences of public K-12 general education teachers who use research-based frameworks and strategies to educate students who are identified with emotional disabilities. Eight participants will be invited to participate in this research as part of the principal investigator’s dissertation research.

**WHY ARE YOU BEING ASKED TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROJECT?**

You are being asked to participate in this research project because you are a certified teacher in the state of Connecticut who works with or has worked with students who are identified with emotional disabilities and are 18 years of age or older.

**WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THIS PROJECT?**

- You will be asked to participate in one semi structured interview with the principal investigator that will last approximately 60 minutes and will be conducted over Zoom.
- You can choose a pseudonym (alias) to be used in place of your name for the study.
- You will be given the opportunity to leave your camera on or off during the interview, and your interview will be audio recorded using Zoom.
- You will be emailed a copy of your interview transcript to review for accuracy. You will have five business days to respond or the principal investigator will assume that you have no comments and the transcript will assumed to be accurate.

**WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS INVOLVED FROM BEING IN THIS PROJECT?**

The risks involved with participation in this research project are minimal and may include an invasion of privacy or loss of confidentiality. The risk will be minimized by using a pseudonym for each of the participants names and by eliminating any identifying information from the study. Participants will have the opportunity to review their transcripts for accuracy and will be given the choice to have their cameras off during the interview. Participants have the right to skip or not answer any questions, for any reason.

Please see the ‘WHAT ABOUT PRIVACY & CONFIDENTIALITY?’ section below for steps we will take to minimize an invasion of privacy or breach of confidentiality from occurring.

**WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE BENEFITS FROM BEING IN THIS PROJECT?**

There are no likely benefits to you by being in this research project; however, the information we collect may help us understand the experiences of general education teachers use of frameworks and strategies used to educate students identified with emotional disabilities.

**WILL YOU BE COMPENSATED FOR BEING IN THIS PROJECT?**

You will not be compensated for being in this research project.

**WHAT ABOUT PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY?**

We will do our best to keep your personal information private and confidential. However, we cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. Additionally, your information in this research project could be reviewed by representatives of the University such as the Office of Research Integrity and/or the Institutional Review Board.

The results of this research project may be shown at meetings or published in journals to inform other professionals. If any papers or talks are given about this research, your name will not be used. We may use data from this research project that has been permanently stripped of personal identifiers in future research without obtaining your consent.

The following additional measures will be taken to protect your privacy and confidentiality:
General Considerations:

- Data will only be collected during one on one participant interviews using Zoom, no information will be taken without participant consent, and transcribed interviews will be check by participants for accuracy before they are added to the study.
- Pseudonyms will be used for all participants and any personally identifying information will be stripped from the interview transcript.
- All names and e-mails gathered during recruitment will be recorded and linked to a uniquely assigned pseudonym within a master list.
- The master list will be kept securely and separately from the study data and accessible only to the principal investigator.
- The interview will be conducted in a private setting to ensure others cannot hear your conversation.
- Participants are given the option to turn off their camera during Zoom interview.
- Once member checking of the transcribed interview is complete the recorded Zoom interview will be destroyed
- Once all transcripts have been verified by the participants, the master list of personal information will be destroyed.
- All other study data will be retained on record for 3 years after the completion of the project and then destroyed. The study data may be accessed upon request by representatives of the University (e.g., faculty advisors, Office of Research Integrity, etc.) when necessary.
- All data collected will be stored on a password protected personal laptop computer accessible only by the principal investigator.

WHAT IF YOU WANT TO WITHDRAW FROM THIS PROJECT?

You have the right to choose not to participate, or to withdraw your participation at any time until the master list is destroyed without penalty or loss of benefits. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in this project.

If you request to withdraw from this project, the data collected about you will be deleted when the master list is in existence, but the researcher may not be able to do so after the master list is destroyed.

WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS PROJECT?

You have the right to ask, and have answered, any questions you may have about this research project. If you have questions about this project, complaints or concerns, you should contact the Principal Investigator listed on the first page of this document.

WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT?

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, or if you would like to obtain information or offer input, you may contact the Office of Research Integrity at (207) 602-2244 or via e-mail at irb@une.edu.
Appendix C
Interview Protocol

Script

Thank you so much for volunteering to be interviewed for my doctoral study titled, EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF PUBLIC K-12 GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS WITH RESEARCH-BASED FRAMEWORKS AND STRATEGIES FOR STUDENTS WITH EMOTIONAL DISABILITY. Before we begin, I would like to review the contents of the Participant Information Sheet that I emailed to you with the invitation to participate in this study. The first section of the Participant Information Sheet introduces my study and outlines its purpose (I will read aloud through these sections and ask if they have any questions).

Here is what you can expect from your participation in the study including potential risks and confidentiality measures that have been taken (I will read aloud through these sections and ask if they have any questions). The interview today will last approximately 60 minutes. I will be asking you questions about your role as a K-12 general education teacher working with students identified with emotional disabilities.

Now that we have reviewed what to expect during this interview and the aspects of the Participant Information Sheet, I would like to confirm if you are ready to proceed with the recorded interview. Please remember that you may choose to stop the interview at any time or choose not to answer a particular question. If you have any questions that arise as we proceed through the interview, please ask them at any time. Thank you again for your participation in this interview, I really appreciate it.

1. How long have you worked as a general education teacher?
2. What are your roles and responsibilities as a general education teacher teaching students identified with emotional disability?

Thank you for sharing information about staff and students in your building and your role as a general education teacher, teaching students with emotional disability. Now I would like to ask you more about your perceptions of the central phenomenon.

IQ 1: When working with students identified with an emotional disability, can you describe any challenges you have with academic management?

IQ 2: What strategies have you used to manage these challenges and how were they useful?

IQ 3: Universal Design Learning is a framework that has three guiding principles that guide educators to support all learners by providing multiple ways of engaging students, representing knowledge, and demonstrating understanding. How would you describe the use of Universal Design Instruction within your classroom? What strategies do you use to support this framework?

IQ 4: How would you describe your preparedness to use research based frameworks and strategies for academic management in your classroom for students identified with and emotional disability?

IQ 5: How would you describe the availability of materials and resources for academic management within your school concerning research based frameworks and strategies for teaching students identified with an emotional disability?

IQ 6: When working with students identified with an emotional disability, can you describe any challenges you have with classroom management?

IQ 7: Can you describe the frameworks or strategies you used to manage these challenges?
IQ 8: Social and emotional learning is a process where individuals can acquire the knowledge, skills, and an attitude to manage emotions, feel empathy for others, and achieve individual and collective goals within an academic setting. This may look like students using pre-taught self-management and regulation skills to manage their emotional and allow for increased time for academic learning. How would you describe the use of social emotional teaching and learning within your classroom?

IQ 9: How would you describe your preparedness to use research based frameworks and strategies for classroom management in your classroom for students identified with and emotional disability?

IQ 10: How would you describe the availability of materials and resources for classroom management within your school concerning research based frameworks and strategies for teaching students identified with an emotional disability?

IQ 11: When working with students identified with an emotional disability, can you describe any challenges you have with student-teacher relationships?

IQ 12: Can you describe strategies you have used to manage these challenges?

IQ 13: Praise to reprimand ratio is a strategy that provides individualized reinforcement for on-task behavior and task completion at a high rate. For example during instruction, a teacher would provide individualized reinforcement for on-task behavior and task completion at a high rate, praising students with ED at a 9:1 ratio. How would you describe the use of praise to reprimand ration when working with students identified with ED?

IQ 14: How would you describe your preparedness to use research based frameworks and strategies for student teacher relationships in your classroom for students identified with and emotional disability?
IQ 15: How would you describe the availability of materials and resources for student teacher relationships within your school concerning research based frameworks and strategies for teaching students identified with an emotional disability?

Before we conclude this interview, is there anything else about your experiences using research based frameworks and strategies as a general education teacher, teaching students with emotional disability in the classroom that we have not yet had a chance to discuss? Thank you again for your willingness to participate in my study. I will send you the transcripts via email within five days and then you have five days to review, retract, or withdraw information. After five days, if no revisions are suggested, the transcript will be considered accurate.
Appendix D

IRB Exemption Letter

| DATE OF LETTER: | January 18, 2023 |
| PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: | Denise Arnaukas |
| FACULTY ADVISOR: | Andrea Disque, Ed.D. |
| PROJECT NUMBER: | 0123-03 |
| RECORD NUMBER: | 0123-03-01 |
| PROJECT TITLE: | EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF PUBLIC K-12 GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS WITH RESEARCH-BASED FRAMEWORKS AND STRATEGIES FOR STUDENTS WITH EMOTIONAL DISABILITY |
| SUBMISSION TYPE: | Exempt Project |
| SUBMISSION DATE: | 1/3/2023 |
| ACTION: | Determination of Exempt Status |
| DECISION DATE: | 1/18/2023 |
| REVIEW CATEGORY: | Exemption Category # 2 (ii) |

The UNE Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects has reviewed the materials submitted in connection with the above referenced project and has determined that the proposed work is exempt from IRB review and oversight as defined by 45 CFR 46.104.

Additional IRB review is not required for this project as submitted. However, if any changes to the design of the study are contemplated (e.g., revision to the protocol, data collection instruments, interview/survey questions, recruitment materials, participant information sheet, and/or other IRB-reviewed documents), the Principal Investigator must submit an amendment to the IRB to ensure the requested change(s) will not alter the exempt status of the project.

Please feel free to contact me at (207) 602-2244 or irb@une.edu with any questions.

Best Regards,

Bob Kennedy, MS
Director, Research Integrity