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Functional Behavioral Assessment: Putting the Function Into Functional Behavioral Assessments

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Abstract

As more students are moved from self-contained to inclusive classroom environments general educators will need the capacity to meet all students' needs. The purpose of this qualitative case study explored how school personnel (school psychologists, intervention specialists, and general educators) perceived the influence of Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) on classroom behavior. This exploration was guided by the behaviorism theoretical framework. Behaviorism as a theoretic framework for FBA considers what is directly happening in the environment from an antecedent or external stimulus-response perspective. The snowball sampling technique was used and resulted in 20 participants. The demographic questionnaire, individual interviews, and focus groups data were collected, organized and analyzed to understand the perception of specific school personnel who have responsibility for conducting FBA leading to an effective function-based behavior intervention plan. Transcripts of the individual interviews and focus groups were analyzed manually and then using In Vivo and Open coding within Atlas.ti. The results revealed that general educators would benefit from FBA training that increased their ability to identify the function of student challenging behavior as an initial intervention. School personnel who comply with IDEA mandates maintain compliance.

Keywords: Functional Behavioral Assessment, FBA/BIP, IDEA, PBIS, training, student behavior

Dedication

This journey has not been without its challenges. Yet, it was worth every speedbump. First, to God be all the glory and praise. I dedicate this dissertation to my childhood love, Roland my husband, and greatest supporter. I am blessed to be the mother of two phenomenal women, my other greatest supporters and loves, our daughters, Rolnecia and Marcina. You are my heartbeats (Always Stay Humble and Kind). Thank you, Aunt Mary and Uncle William, no words can express. Darlene and James, sibs, I love you. Thank you, Tony and Delphine, for blessing us to be the godparents of your young men of integrity Tony Jr., James, and Nathan. Lastly, this dissertation is dedicated to Janie my "Lois," Mom, I miss you!

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Thank you, Dr. Graham, Dr. Markette, and Dr. Shelton for being a part of my dissertation committee. Your support and feedback are appreciated. Dr. Graham, when it was time to select our dissertation chair and I was beyond happy that you would be my chair. I felt we had some academic and professional commonalities including your familiarity with my hometown. Also, thank you for your support and continuous feedback. I can look back and chuckle now . . . because I panicked when I thought it was over, all that work and no access to collect data at the last minute. You calmly had the answer. The rest is a memory and now at the end of this journey, Dr. Graham, I say thank you. Blessings!

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction to the Problem

The United States Department of Education's National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS) report during the 2015–2016 school term 43% classes of teachers responded that student behavior interfered with their teaching (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). The NTPS also found that cutting class and tardiness also interfered with teaching. Cutting classes and tardiness happened more often at the middle and high school levels. Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBA) are to be conducted for students with disabilities engaging in challenging behaviors. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; 2004) concurs with the literature that FBA is best practice and benefits students not identified with a disability.

FBA is a process that requires a commitment to think beyond traditional responses to behavioral problems in schools. Educators are challenged to follow a problem-solving format toward finding the cause of challenging student behavior. Assessing beyond the displayed behavior to the purpose, cause or function is essential. Functional Behavioral Assessment is conducted to identify target behavior(s) and their purposes. Identifying this purpose or function assists in planning effective behavioral interventions. Anderson, Rodriguez, and Campbell (2015) explained, "Functional behavior assessment (FBA) is an umbrella term for various methods used to identify environmental variables that evoke and maintain problem behavior" (p. 338). This qualitative study explored how school personnel perceived FBA. This study defines school personnel to include, school psychologists, intervention specialists, and general education teachers.

This chapter includes a brief history and a discussion of the theoretical framework that supports the FBA process. Educators who understand the connection between FBA and applied

behavior analysis (ABA) within the school context where challenging behavior is displayed are more able to effectively intervene (Young & Martinez, 2016). A statement of the problem and the study's purpose, significance, and research question follow. Concluding this chapter is the definition of terms, assumptions, delimitations, limitations, a chapter summary, and a short organization of the remaining chapters.

Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework to the Problem

FBA has a foundation in ABA. Trump et al. (2018) explained in their discussion about ABA and the use of FBA "These assessment methods use a person-centered approach and do not treat behaviors such as aggression (e.g. hitting, kicking, spitting) the same way for every student who engages in aggressive behaviors" (p. 388). Assessment and learning about student behavior can be achieved through direct practice and observation. Although behavioral analysis is not a new theory, it has become the directive for disciplinary mandates in United States schools (Fryling, 2013).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) amendment of 1997 requires that in certain situations students receiving special education services, an FBA should be conducted. This mandate is directed specifically for special education populations. This directive contends that students who display sustained behavioral problems, which interrupt not only their learning but also the learning of others, shall have a FBA conducted. The FBA process helps educators identify the purpose the misbehavior is serving for the student so that interventions can effectively decrease or extinct the behavior.

Statement of the Problem

This study indicates that FBA is a tool for dealing with problem behavior in educational environments. Identifying the purpose or function of a behavior is essential to eliminating

reoccurring negative actions. Young, Andrews, Hayes, and Valdez (2018) explained, "The more we understand the function of behaviors the more we are able to intervene early on before behaviors become persistent. Thinking functionally should be foundational to every teacher's behavior management plan" (p. 423). Over two decades since IDEA's 1997 amendment, many educators still do not have a clear understanding of how to follow discipline procedures. The 1997/2004 amendment of IDEA for the first-time addressed behavior as part of a Free Appropriate Public Education. It is important that district administrators ensure the implementation of IDEA requirements if only for the benefits of pursuing educational best practices.

Research that is discussed in chapter two found that educators benefit from FBA training. Although, McCahill, Healy, Lydon, and Ramey (2014) found in their review of 25 varied FBA training studies the experience, training level or knowledge of ABA did not hinder gaining skills in FBA. The IDEA (2004) reauthorizations reemphasize the importance of discipline procedures for students identified and suspected to have special needs. Educators without FBA training often do not understand their role in changing variables in the classroom to improve student behavior. Most often interventions rely on removing the student displaying problem behaviors.

Exploring how school personnel experience FBA through a qualitative case study provided a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. Exploring this phenomenon will help interpret school personnel's perception of the influence of FBA on classroom behaviors. Although this study's participants work in an urban school environment, rural educators face similar behavior challenges often identified with public urban schools (Scott & Burt, 2018). According to Hannon (2016), there are differences between urban and rural students. Hannon

(2016) focused on urban high school counselors who saw differences as gaps in resources and course availability.

IDEA mandates that an FBA be conducted on behalf of any child with behavioral challenges. Educators in rural and urban learning environments acknowledge their lack of skills to intervene with challenging student behaviors (Scott & Burt, 2018). There is a significant body of FBA research studies that take place in public schools. The ability of school personnel to implement and conduct an FBA that lead to an effective function-based behavioral intervention plan was more often the focus of best practice research. While the FBA process can be lengthy and more often conducted by specialized school personnel studies indicate that general educators can gain skills to apply effective behavioral interventions.

Conducting FBA involves a series of carefully designed steps resulting in an effective BIP that will help extinct challenging student behaviors. The techniques utilized in the FBA process include both direct and indirect methods. Direct methods include observing the student in an environment where the problem behavior is displayed. Indirect methods include looking at student records and historical data. Sources may also include any other community support information on the student displaying problem behavior. Professionals familiar with the FBA or behavior analysis should conduct direct observations (Hirsch, Bruhn, Lloyd, & Katsiyannis, 2017; Hirsch, Kennedy, Haines, Newman Thomas, & Alves, 2015). Direct observations are considered the most effective practice. Even though specialized school personnel are trained to conduct FBA, general classroom teachers can gain skills that will help identify the purpose of student challenging behavior (Dunlap & Kern, 2018; O'Neill & Bundock, 2015). When the purpose of student behavior is identified appropriate interventions can more effectively support the student.

An important part of the FBA process includes identifying what preceded the problem behavior. For example, a student is made fun of by a classmate while reading. The incident provoking the ridicule may have happened prior to the classroom, on the school bus, or at home. It is also significant to know the consequence that followed the unwanted behavior. At times, the consequences experienced by the student may sustain the problem behavior. For example, a student misbehaves and is removed from the class, which served a purpose to escape from the task or activity. The use of FBA with extinction procedures was found to be an effective classroom intervention (Janney, Umbreit, Ferro, Liaupsin, & Lane, 2013). The acronym ABC meaning "antecedent, behavior, and consequence" are terms used when conducting FBA (Anderson et al., 2015; Bruhn et al., 2015; Crone, Hawken, & Horner, 2015; Hadaway & Brue, 2016; Hirsch et al., 2017). Knowing what preceded behavior, and the consequence of the behavior can be significant; a consequence can maintain the behavior or extinguish it.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how school personnel (school psychologists, intervention specialists, and general educators) perceive the influence of FBA on classroom behaviors. Teachers and administrators are required by the IDEA to apply FBA strategies when developing intervention plans for individual students. Dunlap and Kern (2018) noted among the federal mandates of the IDEA, endorsements for the use of FBA include many professional organizations. School personnel are better prepared to carry out this requirement if they are trained and skilled in conducting FBA. This study showed how school personnel perceived the influence of FBA on classroom behaviors. These are critical concerns for districts because knowledge and training may affect the quality of support provided to students and the implementation of IDEA mandates.

Research Question

This study was guided by the following research question:

RQ. How do school personnel (school psychologists, intervention specialists, and general educators) perceive the influence of FBA on classroom behaviors?

This qualitative study explored how school personnel perceived FBA. School districts are legally obligated to follow certain procedures when disciplining students identified with a disability. Conducting an FBA will not only benefit students with special needs but those students in the general education population (Gable, Park, & Scott, 2014). The exploration of this research study's question used the following data sources questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups.

Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study

Beginners and seasoned educators find addressing challenging student behaviors of a few is time-consuming and leaves less time for academics (Lewis, Hatton, Jorgenson, & Maynard, 2017). Exploring how school personnel experience FBA may identify unrecognized barriers to its effective use. FBA, when implemented with fidelity, leads to an effective Behavior Intervention Plan (Bruhn & Lewis, 2015).

IDEA identified FBA as a strategy for addressing student behavior issues. FBA and School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS), when implemented with fidelity, support varied levels of students' behaviors. As more school districts invest the time and training to implement a systemic behavioral plan, schools can experience positive change (Dunlap & Kern, 2018). A vital component of school-wide positive behavioral support is its focus on proactive preventive strategies. All stakeholders including parents and community partners are identified as school-wide positive supports to secure a safe and orderly environment for students.

Definitions of Terms

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA): ABA "is a therapy based on the science of learning and behavior" (Autism Speaks, para 1).

Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP): BIP is a plan that is developed from an FBA that focused on the function or purpose of a student's challenging behavior leading to interventions that reinforce positive behaviors (Borgmeier, Loman, Hara, & Rodriguez, 2015).

Behaviorism: A term used by early researchers including Watson and Skinner. A behaviorist's theoretical perspective contends that learned behaviors can be unlearned. Behaviors that are learned can be replaced with an alternative behavior (Hadaway & Brue, 2016).

Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA): FBA is a process to hypothesize the function of challenging student behavior and the development of an effective BIP (Bruhn et al., 2015; Collins & Zirkel, 2017).

Positive Behavior Support Systems (PBSS): PBSS is a comprehensive school-wide strategy that is proactive and preventive addressing behaviors on varied multi-levels (Crone et al., 2015).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): IDEA is a federal law that ensures children with disabilities receive a Free Appropriate Public Education (Ennis, Blanton, & Katsiyannis, 2017).

Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations

Assumptions. Four assumptions have been identified (a) urban public schools serve a large population of students with special needs; (b) FBA have been identified by practitioners and school personnel as an effective tool for addressing student behavior problems; (c) school personnel will benefit from training to effectively implement IDEA FBA directives; and (d)

exploring how school personnel perceive FBA will identify barriers, effective use of and enhance best practices for supporting students.

Delimitations. The selection of specific school personnel from a local school district for this study was purposeful and a matter of convenience. In order to research this topic of interest there needed to be clear boundaries to gain an understanding of the study participants' experiences. This study was bounded by an in-depth focus on specific school personnel from a local school district. A case study design allowed a deeper insight into the perceptions of specific school personnel (school psychologists, intervention specialists, and general educators) to learn about their experiences implementing FBA and to improve practice.

Among the delimitations of this study is the targeted population. Twenty school personnel were identified to participate in this study. These school personnel have direct or collaborative responsibilities for addressing student behaviors and conducting FBA. A significant number of school employees were excluded from this study because of their non-FBA roles and responsibilities within the district. Findings from this study included participants' demographic questionnaire responses, individual interviews, and collaborative focus groups.

Delimitations are within the researcher's control to support the focus of this exploration and to best answer the research question.

- School personnel responsible for conducting FBA or have a collaborative team role was selected for this study. For example, school psychologists and intervention specialists were intentionally recruited. General educators were also among the targeted study participants because of their direct teaching responsibilities, which included responding to student behavior challenges. Excluded from the study were school personnel with non-FBA or teaching responsibilities.

- The questionnaire, interview, and focus group questions were developed and were asked by the researcher.
- The questionnaire consists of multiple-choice selections instead of open-ended statements. This kept data manageable and provided a quick comprehensive glance at the overall general population.

Limitations. In contrast, limitations are outside of the investigator's control. The study findings should be credible and trustworthy. Using varied sources that triangulated the data supports internal validity or credibility. Study participants are the sources for exploring the FBA phenomena. Having participants member-check the accuracy of their perceptions from this exploration enhances believability. A qualitative case study design was selected to explore the FBA phenomenon. This dissertation followed a case study design that yielded a significant amount of data from questionnaire responses, individual interviews, and focus groups. The data from these sources required interpretation and in-depth analysis. A case study design used qualitative data collections within natural settings. Interviews and collaborative focus groups provided a deeper understanding.

This study shows how school personnel perceived the influence of FBA on classroom behaviors. Among the delimitations of this research is the targeted study population. The school personnel had direct or collaborative responsibilities for addressing student behaviors and conducting FBA. Participants are truthful in their responses to the interview questions. This study also focused on a specific targeted group of school personnel from a local school district. The following are three limitations that must be considered as precautions are made to ensure credibility.

- This study was restricted to an urban school district personnel in the state of Ohio. Study participants were given pseudonyms. The selection of specific school personnel for this study was a matter of convenience. The researcher is a recently retired district employee.
- The researcher is a recent retiree employee of the school district. Caution was taken to avoid researcher bias and ensure that findings or themes are accurately presented as shown in the emerging data. School personnel were not pressured to participate because of their familiarity with this researcher. Likewise, participants in this FBA study received honest information about the study's purpose and benefits to their work and their district. Confidentiality was clearly defined in the context of this study. Proceeding in a professional manner during this qualitative case study supported gaining information regarding how school personnel perceived FBA.
- The sample size affects generalizability. Yet, transferability is possible. FBA is a process mandated by IDEA to be implemented throughout United States school districts. Therefore, the perceptions that were explored focused on specific school personnel as they have experienced the phenomenon of FBA. Further research that extends beyond the local school district may provide a larger sample that is more generalized in quantitative study methods. Although, this study will not have the generalizable features of a quantitative study. Transferability will be possible as other school districts are able to connect to the experiences of the study's focused school personnel from a local district. Qualitative data collection consisted of interviews conducted by this researcher with school personnel including school psychologists, intervention specialists, and general education teachers. Data were collected during the fall 2019–2020 school term.

Chapter 1 Summary

This qualitative case study indicates how school personnel (school psychologists, intervention specialists, and general educators) perceived the influence of FBA on classroom behaviors. Conducting FBA can assist school personnel in developing effective Behavior Intervention Plans. Hirsch et al. (2017) described two phrases within the FBA-BIP process. Conducting an FBA is phase one that helps identify the targeted behavior. The BIP which is phase two is developed from an FBA conducted with fidelity. Basing a behavior plan on the information collected through a well-conducted FBA, which identified the purpose or function of behavior, is more apt to decrease or extinguish unwanted behavior. The key to utilizing this process is the understanding that replacement behavior should be taught. The student must be taught appropriate behavior that can meet the same need. Behavior serves at least one purpose attention seeking, avoidance, escape or sensory stimulation. Taking the time to teach a new behavior implies discipline (learning) rather than punishment, which is a temporary solution.

The IDEA mandates that in certain situations when disciplining students identified as receiving special education services certain procedures should be implemented including an FBA. It is important that school personnel understand the legalities and expectations IDEA/IDEIA directives. Training may be the link to districts increasing compliance with student discipline procedures identified as best practices. Collins and Zirkel (2017) explained,

> The content of pre-service and in-service teacher training related to the legal aspects of FBA–BIP should also be carefully considered. Thus, training should focus on providing practitioners with accurate interpretations of the law and should emphasize how best-practice recommendations for FBA–BIPs exceed the minimum standards for both the substantive and procedural dimensions of the law. (p. 188)

Research literature in the field of education and behavior found that districts are not only accountable for providing certain interventions when disciplining students identified with special needs but also it is best practice.

The literature review in Chapter 2 presents information in five areas that support this study. Chapter 3 focuses on research methods, which provides the basics for this study including the rationale for using a qualitative case study design. A detailed description of sample participants that were identified through a snowball technique is presented. Chapter 4 presents the results and findings that emerged from the lenses of participants. The results were grouped by emerging themes that provided a deeper understanding of how participants experience FBA. A summary of this study is given in the concluding Chapter 5. A comprehensive view of the findings and implications are discussed in this section. An assessment of the research findings provided recommendations for further study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The intent of this qualitative study was to understand and extend the data on FBA use in schools. Research focusing on FBA implementation in schools found that utilizing FBA maintains professional practice (Crone, Hawken & Horner, 2015). Although, FBA was directed as a behavioral support for students with special needs and conducted by specific school personnel, training in the process supports educators' intervention knowledge (Katsiyannis, Balluch, & Losinski, 2016). Educators and students in the general education classroom also benefit from the FBA process when implemented with fidelity. Exploring FBA use from the perceptions of school personnel provided an opportunity for further insights in implementation knowledge, and behavioral concerns.

Researchers found that educators more often respond to behavior problems within the classroom according to building and district guidelines which focuses on punishment. Strickland-Cohen and Kennedy et al. (2016) informed us that, "FBA continues to be underutilized in school settings, and educators consistently struggle to design and implement effective individualized supports" (p. 236). Most interventions do not address the function or cause of behavior. A more effective reaction to problem behavior would be to focus on discipline, which, suggest teaching, learning and practice. Problem behaviors reoccur or increase because there was a mismatch between the problem behavior displayed and the function of that behavior. The FBA process is well documented as a strategy to address problem behavior systematically (Dunlap & Kern, 2018, Freeman et al., 2018; Loman & Hunter, 2014).

This chapter includes a discussion of five areas that support this study. First, background on the Individuals with the IDEA will be given. This discussion is important because IDEA is an

initial directive to educators regarding students with special needs and the use of FBA. Research studies included in this review include a discussion of the mandated directives from IDEA and IDEIA. IDEA and IDEIA provide guidelines for school personnel to conduct an FBA specifically for students with special needs who display problem behaviors and are facing disciplinary consequences. IDEA specifically mandates the use of and the conditions in which an FBA is to be conducted to address student behavior problems. Moreno, Wong-Lo and Bullock (2017) explained, "During the FBA process, educators collect and analyze qualitative (e.g., interviews, attendance records) and quantitative data (e.g., scatterplot, frequency count) to develop a hypothesis that effectively predicts the circumstances of the behavioral demonstration" (p. 55).

Secondly, FBA has its conceptual foundation in the ABA field. Behaviorism provides not only a historical foundation for FBA but also a theoretical framework. Obtaining an understanding of ABA is essential to the premise that FBA can be a useful resource guiding an investigation and resolution to student behavior problems particularly for behavioral analyst (Chezan, Layden, Barnhill and Barthold (2018). Discussed in this section is the overrepresentation and placement of certain groups into special education (Strassfeld, 2017). There is significance for conducting FBAs that are culturally sensitive. Guidelines were presented on conducting culturally sensitive FBAs.

Thirdly, discussing the research on training modalities and assessing the body of literature suggested school personnel may need training on FBA process. In order to provide effective support to staff and manage student behavior school psychologists and specialists may support general educators to identify the function of student problem behavior. Research studies have found that FBAs can be conducted by school personnel besides school psychologists and

other specialists with appropriate training (Borgmeier, Loman, Hara, & Rodriguez, (2015). Student problem behavior remains a challenge as more students are identified with special needs.

Regarding, student behavior, Positive Behavior Support Systems (PBSS or PBS), similarly known as Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS) in schools, use FBA as one of the components of its strategy. However, there is a broader scope to PBSS or PBIS. For example, Zhang, McCray and Cho (2014) informed, "Building positive relationships with CLD (culturally and linguistically diverse) students through the use of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports is the key element to positive classroom management and will minimize referrals to special education due to behavioral differences" (p. 20). As PBS is discussed in its comprehensive format, the place of FBA in this structure was also disclosed.

Districts across the nation are creating positive school climates that engage in and support staff in forming an atmosphere of positive relationships and learning environments. Schools that work toward creating positive school environments have increased student academic achievement and engagement (Konold, Cornell, Jia & Malone, 2018). Positive school climate committees have also become an additional support for reinforcing a positive school environment. The initiatives that focus on positive school climate have been, for example, simple extra fun activities that are given as positive consequences to decrease negative behaviors. The goal is to eliminate the need for negative consequences that lead to office referrals and for students with special needs FBAs. Self -regulatory schools where positive school functioning is understood improves student learning and behavior (Adams, Ware, Miskell & Forsyth, 2016).

The challenges between state laws and legal obligations do not dismiss the effectiveness of utilizing FBA to decrease challenging student behavior (Zirkel, 2016). As more parents become astute about the rights of their children with an identified or suspected disability, legal

actions are pursued. Losinki, Katysiyannis and Ryan (2013) identified three New York cases initiated by parents on behalf of their child. The cases, Danielle G v. New York City Department of Education (DOE), A.C. ex rel. M. C. v. Board of Education of the Chappaqua Central School District and A. L. and V.R. ex rel. E. L. v. New York City DOE each of these legal actions pertained to FBA and access to a FAPE. These cases had differing results that either found in favor of the parents or the school district. In two of the cases the courts found that absence of an FBA did not violate IDEA and in the other case the IEP addressed the student's behavior. One of the three cases cited by Losinki et al. (2013) resulted in favor of the parents citing that failure to conduct an FBA did not address challenging behaviors that impacted learning.

Background of Problem: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

IDEA is a federal law. Prior to 1990 the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act was called Education of the Handicapped Act (EHA). EHA 1970, also became the 1975 Education of All Handicapped Children Act. The Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1990 (P.L. 101-476) renamed the statute the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and throughout the text, references to "handicapped children" were amended to read "children with disabilities" (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). In 2004, the 1997 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, although still referred to as IDEA was actually reauthorized as the Individual with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA).There are four purposes of IDEA, to assure that children with disabilities have a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their particular needs; to assure that children with disabilities and parents' rights are protected; to assist state and localities to provide for the education of all children with disabilities; and to assess and ensure the

effectiveness of efforts to educate children with disabilities (U.S Department of Education, IDEA 1995).

The education of students with disabilities was limited if not nonexistent over four decades ago. People with handicaps were excluded from the educational environment as well as having limited excess to public places. According to National Center for Education Statistics' 2015 data 62.5% of students with disabilities are currently learning in inclusive general education environments versus self-contained placements. Unfortunately, when students with disabilities were placed in the traditional learning environment services were not comparable to meet their academic or emotional needs. Losinski, Katsiynnis and Ryan (2013) explained, "Although disciplining students with disabilities has been a persistent and often controversial issue within the public schools, federal legislation did not address the matter until 1997" (p. 251).

IDEA has attempted to provide a framework for educators to deliver a free appropriate public education (FAPE) for all students. Collins and Zurkel (2017) explained, "The basic applicable legal framework for the school context consists of the (a) the IDEA amendments of 2004, which is legislation; (b) the IDEA regulations of 2006; (c) state statues or regulations specific to FBAs and/or BIPs; and (d) case law (p. 181).

Theoretical Framework

FBA has its foundation in applied behavioral analysis (O'Neill & Bundock, 2015; Gable, Park & Scott, 2014). ABA practitioners understand the historical foundation of their work as therapeutically critical to understanding and changing behavior (Chezan, Layden Barnhill & Barthold, 2017; Fryling, 2013). The functional component of ABA emerged from the practice of behaviorists Skinner and Watson. Behaviorism a term developed by Watson and expanded upon by Skinner explains and predicts human behavior (Moore, 2017 & Watson, 1958). Educators

implementing FBA steps through indirect data collection and direct observation gain assessment and learning skills to address student challenging behaviors (Moreno, Wong-Lo & Bullock, 2017).

Behaviorism as a theoretic framework for FBA considers what is directly happening in the environment from an antecedent or external stimulus response perspective. School personnel trained in the FBA process can learn to observe and gather data to assess the antecedent-behavior-and consequence (ABC) that influence student challenging behavior. Understanding ABC is helpful when formulating a plan that will reinforce more appropriate behavior within the classroom. Identifying ABC of students' challenging actions support identifying the function of an unwanted behavior (Borgmeier, Loman & Strickland-Cohen, 2017). Skinner's work on functional relationships between behavior and environment supported the conceptual framework of ABA field. Therefore, influencing the practice of functional analysis and application of FBAs as a process toward effective BIP and part of PBIS within learning environments.

The behavioristic theoretical framework of Skinner and Watson can be found in current research of Dunlap and Kern (2018), Moreno, Wong-Lo and Bullock (2017) and Strickland-Cohen et al. (2016) expounded on the topic of functional behavioral assessments. Behaviorism "is the cornerstone of this vast field of theory, experiment, and application" (p. 10). Behavior that is learned and therefore can be unlearned, supports the purpose and value of BIPs developed from intentionally conducted FBAs (Hadaway & Brue, 2016 & Lewis, Hatton, Jorgenson & Maynard, 2017).

FBAs are an important process for addressing challenging behaviors within the classroom or alternate environments (Oakes, Lane, & Hirsch (2018). An FBA is an IDEA mandated action for students with disabilities as a process leading to an effective intervention plan (Losinski et

al., 2014). The environment in which learning and challenging behavior develops is the workplace of educators. Within FBA and PBS informed classroom educators are assessing the triggers or antecedents that caused unwanted student behavior. Furthermore, the behaviorist view would encourage the shaping and reinforcement of wanted behaviors. Behaviors that are challenging and that impede student learning would not be reinforced.

The key for astute educators addressing challenging student behaviors are the implementation of FBAs and developing BIPs that accurately predict a "functional relationship between behavior and consequence" (Hadaway & Brue, 2016). According to Staddon (2014), behaviorism thoughts include theoretical and radical. Theoretical behaviorism is more classical departing from Skinners and Watson's stimulus-response view (Staddon, 2014). Educators employing FBA take the perspective of Skinner delving into the cause of behavior that will either be reinforced or extinct.

More often specific school personnel conduct FBA. General educators are viewed as important informants within the FBA process. Many studies indicate that educators with training in conducting FBA can identify the function of student challenging behavior improving their own classroom environment. Briefly, an educator thinking functionally would observe the behavior, reflect on the antecedent, behavior and consequence that was implemented. Observing the challenging behavior educators would develop a functional hypothesis (O'Neill & Bundock, as cited in Crone et al., 2015). Lastly, based on the educator's functional hypothesis a behavior plan is created that teaches a positive replacement behavior.

Review of Research Literature

Functional behavioral assessment. FBA is a useful tool that can assist in the development of effective behavioral support plans. Taylor and Abernathy (2016) explained,

> In order to have a greater likelihood of developing a successful behavior intervention plan (BIP), there should first be a clear hypothesis, or the determination of a likely function of the problem behavior, therefore, the functional behavioral assessment (FBA) is critical to the development of a student appropriate BIP. (p. 2424)

There is a strong support base for FBA among researchers and practitioners in general. A significant body of literature found that students identified as emotionally disturbed benefit from the FBA process leading to an effective BIP (Collins & Zirkel, 2017). The FBA process is an important guide to developing effective intervention plans. According to Walker and Barry (2017) FBA are conducted collectively and systematically by a team to assess the function or purpose that maintains a problem behavior. Behavior intervention plans derived from FBA are mandated by federal directives. Hirsch et al. (2017), provide an FBA and BIP checklist displayed in the Appendices section.

Legislators and practitioners in the education field recognize value in functional assessment as a tool for addressing behavior problems. Best practices associated with the implementation of FBA has consistently shown three categories tools and strategies, personnel, and training with positive results (O'Neill & Bundock, 2015).

FBA and BIP legal considerations. This section will discuss the early foundational cases that directly involved FBA specifically, behavior plans and discipline concerns regarding students with disabilities. Following the earlier litigations will be a discussion of a few current legal actions regarding implementation of FBA or IDEIA/IDEA. Several cases from the state of New York will be included. The California Positive Environments Network of Trainers (PENT) is a collaborative organization that provides information including positive behavioral intervention data and strategies. Gresham a PENT collaborator explained that schools continue to

be taken to due process over BSPs (Behavior Support Plans). The collaborator found that courts have only issued rulings on procedural aspects of BSP. According to Gresham, courts are getting closer to ruling on substantive aspects of BSPs (It is not a matter of if, it is a matter of when).

The PENT team cited the Alex R. by Beth R. v. Forrestville Valley Community Unit School District case. This case involved the parent's claim that the BSP was substantively insufficient. In the case the court ruled on the side of the school district. The district cannot be held responsible for substantive a criterion that does not exist. The PENT team suggests that the courts will at some point move toward establishing what substantive criteria for a behavior plan. In another substantive case the hearing officer ruled against the district because of failure to consider least restricted placements before placing in IAS. The plan was considered punitive and did not teach replacement behaviors.

Using the precedence of prior legal civil rights cases such as the famous Brown v. the Board of Education, action could be taken in support of students with disabilities in schools (Strassfeld, 2017). One case cited by Strassfeld (2017) involved disproportionality. The case Blunt v. Lower Merion School District (LMSD) was litigated in the Pennsylvania District Court and later in the United States Appeals Court. Litigation filed by plaintiffs alleged the intentional placement of African American students disproportionally into special education. Although, there were violations and evidence of "systematic statistical evidence of racial disproportionality within the special education program and associated special education placements within LMSD in 2007, 2008, and 2009, this was not sufficient to create a prima facie case under Title VI" (Strassfeld, 2017).

The Third Circuit Appeals Court found no prima facie intentionality. In contrast to disproportionate placements into special education. Child Find is a law that mandate that

extensive efforts are used to “identify, locate and evaluate “child with or suspected to have a disability (Ennis, Blanton and Katsiyannis, 2017). Child Find regulations require that district personnel continue activities to identify students at risk as they progress each academic year.

Kefalas Dudek (2018) explained the case of Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District RE-1. The basis for this litigation focuses on free appropriate public education (FAPE). The court judges and legal representatives reviewed two preceding cases, Board of Education of Hendrick Hudson Central School District v. Rowley and Barwacz v. Michigan Department of Education. Two key concepts, “some benefit standard or de minimis standard” and the maximization standard.” The Rowley case involved a deaf student who perform well in school and was promoted each year. The student did not have a sign language interpreter which was the foundation of the dispute. The Supreme court concluded that FAPE was enough and provided sufficient benefit, thus de minimis.

In contrast, the Barwacz case was litigated in a state that applied the maximization standard and as the parents of the Rowley student wanted, concluded that a student with a disability had a right to supports that would allow reaching their maximum potential. Endrew F. is a child with autism. His parent’s concerns were the content of his IEP that now in the fifth grade was the same. His parents removed him from public to private school. Similar circumstance with Endrew’s IEP. The parents wanted the tuition back filed a complaint with the state department of education under IDEA. The courts ruled in partial favor of the Endrew F case concluding that and citing concerns with Rowley case, “declined to hold that every student advancing from graded to grade is automatically receiving FAPE” (Kefalas Dudek, 2018, p. 75).

This current study examined the role of FBA in an urban school district. In addition, minority urban school students are disproportionately identified in special education. There are

varied social, emotional, economic, familial, and classroom issues that may influence challenging behaviors leading to overrepresentation in special education (Bal, Kozleski, Schrader, Rodriguez & Pelton, 2014; Bal, Schrader, Afacan & Mawene, 2016; McCain & Farnsworth, 2018; Moreno & Bullock, 2015; Moreno, Wong-Lo & Bullock, 2014; Strassfeld, 2017). Also, of interest was how selected educators perceived Functional Behavior Assessment. Relying on over 25 years of research and mandates that continues to support or expand on studies that suggest best practices using FBAs with fidelity within the educational environment (Hirsch et al, 2017; IDEA 2015; Loman & Horner, 2014). Specific school personnel (school psychologist, intervention specialist and special educators, behavioral specialist) are conducting FBA as an effort to develop sound and *matched* to function BIP (Collins & Zirkel, 2017).

Research has emerged that found general educators can also conduct FBAs with training and guidance (Hirsch, Kennedy, Haines, Newman & Alves, 2015 & Lorman & Horner, 2014). Educators to conduct effective FBAs that develop useful BIPs best practice requires thinking functionally about a student's challenging behavior (Anderson, Rodriguez, & Campbell, 2015; Borgmeier, Loman, Hara, & Rodriguez, 2015). FBA informed practitioners are more likely to develop behavior intervention plans that decrease negative behaviors and hone into the function of a student's actions (Hirsch, Bruhn, Lloyd & Katsiyannis, 2017: Hirsch, Kennedy, Haines, Thomas & Alves, 2015; Lee, 2018).

O'Neill and Bundock (2015) explained, "Since the resurgence of FBA approaches beginning in the early 1980s, a major focus of research and implementation has been their use in school settings" (p.5). As a result of the implementation of FBA in school settings educators are becoming more adapt to assessing the environment in which challenging behaviors are displayed. The integration of FBA, BIP and Schoolwide Positive Behavior Intervention and

Supports (SWPBIS) further indicate best practices in educational environments (Knoster & Drogan, 2016; Zhang et al., 2014).

Schoolwide positive behavioral supports when comprehensively implemented within in school environments addresses several levels of behavior intervention. These levels of intervention move upward according to the intensity of behaviors. Providing the support to school environments are seen in the conceptual and theoretical foundation of applied behavioral analysis, behaviorism and aspects of learning theory. Learning theory which is linked to the therapeutic practice of behavioral analyst that include the use of FBA as a part of intervention with children with autism displaying challenging behaviors.

The problem that this study show is how specialized school personnel perceive the influence of FBA on classroom behaviors. ABA and behavior learning theory as a form of behaviorism are useful lens in which school personnel can conduct IDEA mandated FBA to decrease or eliminate behaviors that impede learning. A distinction between ABA practitioners in varied settings is their focus on social behavior in contrast to school personnel who are utilizing FBA as a tool to hypothesize and decrease challenging behaviors (Fryling, 2013). There remains an important practice between both professional roles a clear and relevant focus on functional analysis. ABA practitioners require specific education and training (Chezan & Layden et al., 2018). Behavior analyst who specialize in ABA and work with certain populations also support students and staff in school settings. Research studies have described FBA in terms of an investigation, a strategy, problem-solving or a comprehensive collaboration of several methods (Anderson, Rodriguez, & Campbell, 2015). Behavior analyst in varied environments and educators in school settings share a common FBA practice connecting the function of student behavior to the purpose it serves.

FBA as a process or multi-step investigation focuses on identifying the relationship between function of and consequences that increase or decrease student behavior. According to research (Loman and Horner, 2014; Oakes, Lane and Hirsch, 2017) the FBA process consist of indirect and direct data collection leading to a hypothetical judgement of the function or purpose of a student's challenging behavior. FBA described as an investigative process by Moreno, Wong-Lo, and Bullock (2017) include indirect information gathering, direct observation and lastly what the researchers called the Behavioral Hypothesis Stage. Moreno et al. (2017) explained, "Following the theoretical framework of behaviorism, the FBA team drafts behavioral hypothesis comprised of three components: antecedent (A), target behavior (B), consequence (C), which succinctly communicates the dynamics of the target behavior" (p. 57). The behavioral hypothesis can be modified as additional observations of the student takes place. It is important that the behavioral hypothesis be accurate because it will be included in the basis of an effective behavioral intervention or support plan.

Anderson et al, (2015) described FBA as a pre-intervention assessment conducted to develop a hypothesis about environmental variables that evoked or maintained problem behavior (p. 340). Hypothesized purpose or function of behavior addressed within the environment that challenges occur coincide with the philosophy of Watson, Skinner and current research taking place in school settings (Bruhn & Balint-Langel et al., 2015; Collins & Zirkel, 2017). Student behavior problems can be affected by classroom environment because of instructional, educator response or the students own emotional condition. Lloyd, Weaver, and Staubitz (2017) further explain two types of strategies for the classroom that utilize hypothesize testing in the FBA process. Structural and Functional analysis are employed within the classroom when initial hypothesis was inaccurate.

Systemic behavioral support. Research found that best practice for school personnel is training classroom and special education teachers in the FBA process that recognize purpose and function of student problem behavior to decrease reoccurrence (Hadaway & Brue, 2016; Hirsch et al., 2017; Lewis et al., 2017; Scott & Cooper, 2017). More often students displaying behavior challenges are considered *the problem*. FBA practices or strategies allow school personnel to embrace another lens of viewing challenging behavior as a student *having a problem*. Encompassing the perspective of behaviorists Skinner, Watson and current researchers assessing the environment in which problem behavior occurs and the antecedent or stimulus that provoke a response. A proceeding hypothesis can be drawn within the steps of conducting an FBA leading to an effective BIP and resulting PBIS. PBIS implemented schoolwide supports all students beyond those protected by IDEA regulations.

FBA and PBIS can be collaborative there are differences. FBA is usually conducted on behalf of a specific student. PBIS provide support for individual students, classroom and school wide (PBIS OSEP Technical Assistance Center). Horner, Sugai and Lewis (2015) provided an explanation for their three-tier SWPBIS prevention model. An overview of Horner et al. (2015) SWPBIS model is important to discuss in this section. There are three prevention tiers which suggests actions to take prior to and response to challenging behaviors at different levels of intensity. Horner et al. (2015) prevention model's three intensity levels differ from other PBIS models because of Core elements actions. In place in school settings according to Horner et al. (2015) are core elements that are preventive moving toward actions that school personnel would take as students display at risk to severe behaviors. The complete SWPBIS Prevention Model is displayed in the appendices section.

PBSSs are found in the literature to be an effective preventive and as needed multi-tiered leveled behavior intervention (Gagnon, Barber, & Soyturk, 2018; Knoster & Drogran, 2016; McCurdy et al., 2016). FBA that are conducted with fidelity and produce functioned based BIPs support system wide positive behaviors (Zhang, McCray, & Cho, 2014). Primary interventions are directed at all students within the school environment or system. These may include minor code of conduct or classroom offenses. The secondary interventions are student that may be at risk of developing more severe behavior problems. Tertiary interventions target students with severe behavior difficulties. Horner, Sugai and Lewis (2015) identified the need for an FBA at the tertiary level within their prevention model. PBSS tiers or levels are concerned with the context in which the behaviors occur. Prevention and proactive strategies are key. An important feature of PBIS is the role that all staff and family provide in supporting students and creating a safe and orderly environment.

Review of Methodological Issues

Perusing past and current literature found that depending on the purpose, context and resources available researchers have used varied methodologies. Anderson, Rodriguez and Campbell (2015) conducted a systematic review of varied FBA methods within school environments to provide guidelines for implementing best practices. Researchers have employed different methodologies to study the use and implementation of an FBA. Within this literature review researchers chose the type of methodology that would appropriately demonstrate reliable findings. With this understanding not, all research on FBA reviewed was conducted as a formal empirical study. At times, researchers went into the educational environment to see first-hand the impact, implementation or lack of best practice to support schools and report their findings. More often the body of FBA literature in school settings are concerned with school personnel

knowledge, use and compliance. Likewise, research connected educator behavior intervention knowledge or lack of, with the need for FBA training. Whether a study's methodology has qualitative or quantitative data. Academic readers want to be able to rely on the findings and in some cases be able to replicate a study.

Since an FBA that leads to a functioned based BIP is a mandated directive from IDEA a significant body of literature has been conducted using varied methodologies. For school personnel to comply with these mandates a significant body of literature has also been added to the field supporting educator or specialized supported FBA implementation. This body of literature spans the choices between qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methodologies. In some cases, researchers create methods or tools that will guide them to new insights related to the purpose and problem of their study (Bal et al., 2016; Borgmeier et al., 2015; Flanagan & DeBar, 2018; Hirsch et al., 2015; Korinek, 2015; Kunnavatana et al., 2013; Lloyd et al., 2017). Some research may be conducted in school settings with the goal to only assess the efficacy of a tool created to support FBA use.

A substantive body of studies on the topic of FBA can be described as examinations and explorations. Many of the articles are written by academics or seasoned practitioners across disciplines. Research in this literature review was conducted by professionals who are experts in their field and knowledgeable of FBA. These researchers had specific purposes and goals for their interests in the FBA process in school settings and alternative environments. Frequently in school settings researcher's interest of study focused on FBA utilization, legal compliance and to enhance best practices (McCahill et al., 2014; Walker & Barry, 2017; Zirkel, 2016). More importantly the expertise of researchers allowed them to develop tools that helped school personnel conduct an FBA that would produce an effective BIP. A functioned based BIP would

help decrease or eliminate challenging student behavior. In addition, experts studied the use of FBA in school settings and how the process could be streamlined. As part of the work to streamline the use of FBA, training general educators were regularly discussed in the literature.

Training methodologies. An exceeding amount of studies in this literature review if not focusing on included a discussion about FBA and school personnel training. Teacher retention becomes a problem because more often educators express a lack of training and intervention skills to address students' challenging behaviors (Oakes et al., 2018). It was not a surprise that several studies addressed general educators and their need or ability to conduct FBAs. Research studies indicated that there is a need for training of school personnel in FBA procedures (Borgmeier et al., 2015; Farmer et al., 2016; Hirsch et al., 2015; Kunnavatana & Bloom, 2013; McCain & Farnsworth, 2018; Loman & Horner, 2014). What constitutes quality training may depend on the mode of delivery. Technology and traditional instruction are available by consultants and in district specialized school personnel.

Researchers have created FBA computer-based programs that are developed for group training or self-instruction. These types of training may save time and reach several groups during a specific training or professional development. Because of group training quantitative data can be analyzed and compiled from computer outputs. Quantitative statistics can then be uniformly displayed and presented to internal and external stakeholders. Qualitative findings can also be presented to internal and external stakeholders in a more diverse manner. However, a significant body of studies used qualitative methods for example individual interviews, observations, and groups discussions. The FBA process utilizes quantitative and qualitative data to form a functional hypothesis leading to an effective BIP. FBA informed practitioners are more likely to develop behavior intervention plans that decrease negative behaviors and hone into the

function of a student's actions (Hirsch, Bruhn, Lloyd, & Katsiyannis, 2017: Hirsch, Kennedy, Haines, Thomas, & Alves, 2015; Lee, 2018). The current literature review consists of qualitative and quantitative research methods. Still, mixed method research designs are also a part of this current FBA literature.

Quantitative methodology. Strickland et al. (2016) quantitative study focused on the importance of schools to build capacity to address challenging behaviors before problems become severe. The authors provided a training that would teach school personnel to conduct a "basic FBA to BSP" (Strickland et al., 2016). The study focused on specific elementary and middle school personnel. A 6-hour training package including intermittent questionnaires, surveys, guided with trainer and independent viewing of slides. School personnel practiced in classrooms FBA skills learned in training.

An analysis of the data looked systemically at four research questions about school personnel knowledge, increase use of the FBA, "enablers and barriers" at different points during their training. The researchers learned that building capacity to conduct FBA was enhanced. The data showed a "statistically significant increase" in FBA to BSP knowledge (Strickland et al., 2016). One of the concerns of the study's findings is the lack of generalization. The study trainers included one of the creators of the training package. Therefore, results may be different if the behavior specialist (district staff) had to conduct the training without one of the researchers.

Similarly, Loman and Horner (2014) quantitative study was also interested in providing school personnel with a less complicated FBA. These researchers wanted to find out if "typical" school personnel could conduct a "basic" FBA and identify the antecedent and consequences of a student behavior (Loman & Horner, 2014). The method consisted of three phrases including

training, followed by use of learned FBA skills and last a functional analysis by the trainers to see if the school personnel identified student's A-B-C correctly. The researchers learned that their 4-hour, three phrased training packages was effective in increasing school personnel FBA knowledge. The results of the pretests and posttests demonstrated an average increased FBA knowledge by 3.77% (*SD* = 15.71) (Loman & Horner, 2014, p. 24). However, there was only 12 participants in this study. This study coming prior to the Strickland et al. study contend that the use of school personnel as trainers "could yield more convincing results of the practicality and efficacy of these procedures (Loman & Horner, 2014, p. 29). Lastly, the researchers concern remained whether knowledge of FBA and identifying A-B-C would connect to effective BSP or BIP.

Qualitative methodology. The body of qualitative studies focusing on FBA may use different analytical procedures but more often results are like quantitative findings. The quantitative and qualitative studies regarding FBA in this literature review are concerned with making the process useful, streamlining procedures, training of school personnel, IDEA compliance, and in several studies cultural sensitivity during implementation.

Bal et al. (2014) needed to know if school personnel with support of parents and community members could design culturally responsive SWBPS. Their qualitative study addressed the disproportionate population of students in special education. Bal et al. (2014) used learning labs as a place for internal and external stakeholders to work together as a response to disproportionality within schools. This collaborative effort to change the crisis of disproportionality focused on "culturally and linguistically diverse" (CLD) students (Bal et al., 2014, p. 327). Inclusion and systemic PBIS was the goal of the Learning Lab methodology. The

schools were exclusively from the state of Wisconsin. Although, this study focused on one elementary school in Wisconsin with certain criteria to participate.

Bal et al. (2014) qualitative study was ethnographic analyzing 40 hours of data collected from BSPs, interviews, observations, meetings, and notes. Interestingly, Bal et al. (2014) report that they used "a *Qualitative-Dominant Monotype Mixed Analysis* in which qualitative and quantitative data sources are concurrently analyzed to inform each other: QUAL +" (p. 332). The statistics from the quantitative data was converted into a narrative. In addition, the researchers maintained five criteria to ensure qualitative trustworthiness (Bal et al., 2014).

Lastly, the researchers learned that there were two themes that emerged from their analysis. There are challenges when bringing together four groups of stakeholders who are not normally collaborating at the same time. Bal et al. (2014) identify a real challenge to generalization of their study, limited labs for collaboration. Bal et al. (2014) disproportionality research is important for transforming school culture and addressing the concerns of ESSA.

Methodological issues summary. The collective body of literature provides insights that reinforces the value of an FBA and encourages best practices among school districts across the United States. The IDEA identifies the "use of FBA as best practice" (Hadaway & Brue, 2016). Whether studies are quantitative, qualitative, or a combination as mixed methods. There are propositions and oppositions for and against considering research designs or methodologies as a study is considered. To understand how school personnel, perceive the influence of FBA on classroom behavior this current research will employ qualitative methods. Specific school personnel from a local school district will be the focus of this FBA study.

Synthesis of Research Findings

A commonality among school districts across the country is the need for informed educators utilizing FBAs (Borgmeier et al., 2015; Collins & Zirkel, 2017; Hirsch et al., 2015). More often across school districts and settings FBAs are conducted as an IDEA mandated directive in support of students with an identified disability engaging in challenging behavior. An uncommon aspect of behavior intervention across school districts is the type of FBA used, who conducts it, and the target student (Anderson et al., 2015). A growing body of research suggests that classroom teachers can be trained to assess student behavior identifying the function and purpose of behavior. More often FBAs are conducted by trained intervention specialists, special educators in schools and behavior analyst in diverse settings. Research studies reveal that the practice of FBA team collaborations is more effective in decreasing or eliminating challenging student behavior (Knoster & Drogan, 2016; Moreno et al., 2017; O'Neill & Bundock, 2015; Zhang et al., 2014).

There remains a discrepancy between practice and legal requirements Collins & Zirkel, 2017; Ennis et al., 2017) IDEA directives to conduct FBA in certain situation that pertain to students with disabilities does not give specifics procedures. The failure of school personnel to appropriately comply as stipulated by IDEA can result in legal action. Parental consent is required when conducting behavior and academic evaluations or assessments (Katsiyannis, 2016). A growing number of legal actions have been filed in response to school district's role in addressing academic, behavior, and discipline issues (Bal et al., 2016; Strassfeld, 2017).

A plethora of research has been studied on FBA in school settings and other environments (Anderson et al., 2015; Ennis et al., 2017; Katsiyannis et al., 2016; Korinek, 2015; Lee, 2018). Best practices indicate when FBA methods are implemented with fidelity finding the

function between behavior and consequences can be identified and successfully addressed. Yet, some researchers found that time and lack of training hinder the use of FBA by general educators. As a result of time restraints and lack of knowledge educators retreat to dispensing punitive consequences (Moreno, Wong-Lo & Bullock, 2014 & Trump, 2018). Predicting and changing student challenging behavior using FBA and BIP consist of gathering information from several sources in order to form an accurate hypothesis and connecting reinforcement to appropriate replacement behavior (Hirsch et al., 2017). The review of literature indicates that there is a need for schoolwide assessment of how educators can move beyond FBA compliance toward systemic change. FBA change needed includes hypothesis testing that reflect best practice suggested in the literature which is in contrast to what is actually happening in school settings (Anderson et al., 2015; Bruhn et al., 2015; Horner et al., 2017; Lloyd et al., 2016, 2017; Mooney & Ryan, 2017).

Critique of Previous Research

FBA as a meaningful and useful process for addressing challenging student behavior is well documented and researched (O'Neill & Bundock, 2015). Beyond the mandates of IDEA, researchers have studied the implementation of FBAs in a variety of settings. This study aligns with the body of research that focuses on behavior challenges, individual and schoolwide interventions and legal complications within educational settings. School environments being a place where human behavior naturally occur in isolation and among stakeholders. Human dynamics displayed in school environments among staff, students, parents and external stakeholders can entail positive and complicated interactions. The significance of these interactions from the perspective of stakeholders and informative observations is the focus of a large body of research from different disciplines. Likewise, FBA research has been studied in

educational, behavioral, psychological and legal academic journals, publications and policy directives.

Although, the body of FBA literature is vast and diverse there remains areas that could be further studied within the many professional disciplines. For example, there is a wealth of research suggesting that FBA can be conducted by educators other than specialists with training (Borgmeier et al., 2015; Gable et al., 2014; Hirsch et al., 2015; ; Hirsch et al., 2017; Loman & Horner, 2014; Strickland et al., 2016). However, there remains a need for an expedited FBA that general educators or other non-specialized school personnel can effectively implement. Dunlap and Kern (2018) reprised their initial study looking at what they have learned over the decades. These researchers identified the "most pressing concerns, at least from a practical perspective, have to do with implementation" (p. 318). Dunlap and Kern (2018) explained that if FBA was to be useful non-specialized educators or other school personnel should be able to act as resources. Another interesting challenge found in their current research suggest that direct observations may not be necessary in some cases. Further, Dunlap and Kern (2018) contend that indirect data collection (interviews and checklist) could yield a valid FBA leading to an effective BIP. However, in general most FBA research describe the use of direct and indirect information gathering by trained and non-specialized personnel.

In contrast, the need for FBA training which is well-documented, does not have a substantial body of studies that compare behavioral scenarios within a professional development space versus active conducting of functional assessments within the classroom. Behaviorist as Skinner would suggest that changing and predicting behavior should be observed within the context in which it occurs (Lattal, 2013; Skinner, 1975; Zhang, McCray et al., 2014). In schools,

classrooms and peripheral environments are settings in which challenging behaviors happen and can be addressed.

Anderson et al (2015) found that there was a difference between researcher guided FBA and educator conducted FBAs. As found in other studies, there is a discrepancy between educator practice in schools and FBA literature. Further, research should explore how researcher and educator best practices in schools can better align to conduct FBAs that produce effective BIPs that support systemic schoolwide behavioral interventions.

Chapter 2 Summary

This review of literature reveals that there is a need to explore how school personnel perceive the use of FBA. IDEA mandate that under certain situations an FBA must be conducted leading to a functioned matched BIP. FBA can be time consuming hindering the use of FBAs by specialized and non-specialized school personnel. Researchers have studied and attempted to provide general educators with truncated type FBA's to increase use of this process (Ennis, 2017; O'Neill & Bundock, 2015; Scott & Alter, 2017). Literature found that the use of BIPs based on FBA leads to a decrease or extinction of challenging student behavior when implemented with fidelity (Hirsch et al., 2017; Loman & Horner, 2014; Taylor & Abernathy, 2017). Regardless of the terms that identify the use of FBA in a study (strategy, method, process, intervention) its use has extended over three decades with a foundation in ABA. Hadaway and Brue (2016) explained that, "the FBA approached has a history with deep roots in the field of learning and behavior. Behaviorism or behavioral psychology is the cornerstone to this vast field of theory, experiment, and application" (p. 10).

The literature describes the use of FBA as best practice. Although, FBA terminology may vary, the process is similar throughout studies. Conducting an FBA generally consist of the

following steps, gather indirect information, direct observation(s), formulate a behavioral function and purpose hypothesis. Based on the information gathered and observation an FBA based BIP is developed. For educators and specialized staff to conduct an FBA training is needed. There are school personnel who has been generally responsible for conducting an FBA in schools. Literature and behavioral studies suggest that FBA trained general educators can impact their classroom environment by assessing student's function and purpose of challenging behavior (Bruhn et al., 2015; Hirsch et al., 2015; Hirsch et al., 2017; Taylor & Abernathy, 2016) General educators as part of the greater collaborative building team enhance the effectiveness of systemic positive schoolwide behavior supports and intervention. Lastly, school personnel addressing student challenging behaviors should be aware of not only the professional implications but also the legal requirements that accompany FBAs and BIPs (Collins & Zirkel, 2017; Ennis et al., 2017; Freeman et al., 2018; ; Katsiyannis et al., 2016; Losinski, 2013; Lewis et al., 2017).

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to show how school personnel (school psychologists, intervention and general educators) perceive the influence of FBA on classroom behaviors. Students' challenging behavior displayed may appear to be similar, but the cause or purpose can be quite different (Dieterich, Snyder, & Villani, 2017). BIP that are based on an FBA that identifies the function of behavior decreases or distinct unwanted actions. Exploring FBA as perceived by school personnel provided valuable information to the local school district that will lead to enhancement of best practices regarding student discipline as it applies to the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), schoolwide positive behavioral supports, and FBA training.

School personnel who are responsible for the implementation of IDEA and discipline mandates were participants in this study to explore how they perceive the influence of FBA on classroom behaviors. A team effort is essential in conducting FBA and developing a BIP as behavioral collaboration takes place. Crone et al. (2015) explained behavior support teams are more effective in decreasing challenging behaviors. School districts that benefit from assessing the knowledge base of school personnel refer to IDEA disciplinary mandates regarding FBA and invest in staff development opportunities. District and building administrators are important resources for ensuring IDEA mandates are met. IDEA compliance, as well as the use of the FBA process to achieve a function based BIP, support positive behavior and academic achievement for all students.

Research Question

This study was guided by the following research question:

RQ. How do school personnel (school psychologists, intervention specialists, and general educators) perceive the influence of FBA on classroom behaviors?

District school personnel across the United States, continue to revert to exclusionary, or punitive, discipline (Losinski et al., 2014; Moreno et al., 2017; O'Neill & Bundock, 2015). Oakes et al. (2018) endorsed the teaching of prosocial behaviors for general classroom problems as the most effective strategy for change. Often, the most challenging and severe student behaviors warrant an FBA leading to an effective BIP. Horner et al. (2015) stated that School-Wide Behavior Intervention and Supports (SWPBIS) are a component of best practices. SWPBIS is a multi-tiered, systemic behavioral intervention that addresses behaviors from the least disruptive to the most challenging. At the third or more intense level of the tiered model, FBA is employed to support the most challenging behavior.

Purpose and Design of the Study

A qualitative approach and case study design were selected to answer the FBA phenomenon addressed in the research question. Qualitative approaches are "less static and fixed" compared to quantitative approaches (Holloway & Brown, 2016, p. 46) The purpose of this study is to explore how school personnel (psychologists, intervention specialists, and general educators) perceived the influence of FBA on classroom behaviors. Understanding the perception of study participants as they experience FBA will benefit the local district as IDEA mandates are effectively implemented.

A qualitative case study design was used to explore how school personnel experience FBAs. Yin (2018) explained, "the design is the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study's initial research questions and, ultimately to its conclusions" (p. 62). Exploring how

school personnel experience the FBA process and its usefulness as a tool is essential to implementation with fidelity as directed by IDEA.

A significant body of literature that addresses FBA was found to focus on education. The literature on the topic of FBA found that researchers varied in their choice of design and approaches. FBA studies found in the literature were conducted using qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods (Anderson et al., 2015; Bal et al., 2014; Borgmeier et al., 2015; Moreno et al., 2017). A qualitative case study design was selected for this research. This methodology does not focus on relationships between two or more variables as found in quantitative methodology. Selecting qualitative case study methods will help deepen the understanding of the phenomenon experienced by the participants and provides more flexibility. The need to explore, interpret, and understand the phenomenon of the FBA process particularly in urban educational environments can best be achieved through naturalistic methods. Exploring the perceptions of school personnel within the natural or place of practice is important because direct behavior or experiences can be observed and noted (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The data collected will present a more detailed understanding of the participants' perspectives.

Research Population and Sampling Method

The study participants work in an urban environment of a small mid-western city. The city borders several suburban and rural communities or towns. The insurgence of charter and community schools affected the area. Enrollment competition remains prevalent among private, public, and parochial educational environments within the city due to vouchers and school choice. The participants of this study are implementing new teaching and learning initiatives to increase student academic achievement.

The use of participant interviews provides an opportunity to receive a more personal perception of the participants' FBA experiences. This study focused on 20 district personnel who had direct and indirect responsibility for implementing the mandates of IDEA. A non-probability or purposeful sampling method was used to determined which participants will be recruited for this study. The participants were identified through snowball sampling. Purposeful sampling was specifically selected for this study because the anticipated participants would provide the information to answers the research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The selected study participants are assigned school personnel who teach students or are tasked with implemented behavioral interventions. The school personnel experiences will provide a deeper understanding of their perceptions and experiences with FBA.

The 20 study participants were school psychologists, intervention specialists, and general educators. A potential 1054 school personnel would qualify for inclusion in this study at the local school district. General educators make up the largest group of potential study participants. School psychologists and intervention specialists make up a small fraction of the potential study participants. The recruitment of specific school personnel was important because these participants meet the criteria for inclusion and "reflect the purpose of the study" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 99). The selected participants work in an urban school environment. Access to the study location was not granted therefore a snowball technique was used. Initial contact was made with school personnel who would participate in the study and identify other potential participants to come forward. Once participants were identified through snowball sampling and contact information was received. Potential participants were contacted to confirm their interest. An initial email was sent to direct study participants to a link to begin phase 1 of the study. The

link also presented information about the study, how this research will support the field of education, students and benefit to the potential participant.

Yin (2018) emphasizes the importance of conducting a study with "care and sensitivity" for the participants including obtaining informed consent and maintaining confidentiality (p. 110). Participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identities. School personnel were assigned pseudonyms in an effort to maintain confidentiality throughout and after the study. Study participants were given the informed consent form to read and sign. The participants were ensured that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Sources of Data

The sources of data for this study, were questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups. Using these sources of data allowed the participants to provide meaning to the study's research problem and question not the perspective of this researcher or what is found in the literature (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The use of questionnaires provided a quick overview of the study participants' FBA knowledge. Individual interview discussions consisted of open-ended statements to capture the meaning of study participants' experiences and perceptions of FBA. Focus group discussions consisted of open-end statements. Focus groups were semi-structured but flexible to allow open expressions of perceptions about FBA. Interviewing the study participants, distributing questionnaires, and conducting focus groups assisted in achieving data saturation.

Qualtrics questionnaires were emailed to study participants prior to the interviews and focus groups. The use of questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups enhanced the qualitative process and brought credibility to the emerging investigation. The questionnaires preceded the interviews and focus groups. A researcher designed questionnaire was sent to participants prior

to the semi-structured interviews. The study participants were sent an email with a link to the questionnaire. The questionnaire (see Appendix A), interviews, and focus groups are data sources that provided different perspectives.

Yin (2018) noted interviews are "the most important source of case study evidence" (p. 135). An interview protocol was followed to guide through the qualitative interview process (see Appendix B). Once the selected school personnel agreed to participate in the study. A follow-up email was sent describing the research topic and purpose. The day and time of the individual interviews will be mutually scheduled. Individual interviews were conducted at local businesses and library meeting rooms off school premises. Prior to the interview, participants were given an overview of the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix C). The research open-ended statements questions will be available for the study participants. The individual interviews lasted between 25 and 60 minutes. The study participants responded to open-ended statements. The participant responses were audio-recorded, reviewed by the interviewee, and coded for themes, patterns, and categories.

The focus group sessions were conducted at a local historical facility. The focus group sessions lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. The format for the focus group captured responses that reflected the personal experiences of participants and convey how they perceived the influence of FBA on classroom behaviors. The participants in the focus groups included school personnel who have knowledge and experience in conducting FBA (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Group and individual interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. The study participants reviewed the data to ensure the information captured during the interviews was accurate. Focus group questions are in Appendix D.

The data from the questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups were reviewed and coded. Yin (2018) confided sources of data are complementary neither source has is completely advantageous over the others. Data collected and coded from these sources were organized, uploaded to a computer-assisted qualitative data system and maintained in secured storage. All sources of data were analyzed, and findings reported in Chapter. 4.

Data Collection

An application to the Concordia University–Portland Institutional Review Board (IRB) preceded any data collection process. The snowball sampling technique was used to identify study participants. Qualitative data were collected from questionnaires, interviews, focus groups. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) cautioned researchers to begin analysis during the initial data collection process and throughout to avoid being overwhelmed with data. Beginning analysis during data collection allowed information to be obtained that may not have surfaced during interviews. Data collection occurred at local businesses and libraries outside the participant's workplace to obtain their responses during the individual interviews and focus group meetings. Collecting data outside a controlled setting but within the participant's environment is essential to case studies (Yin, 2018). School personnel were invited to participate in the study by colleagues contacting colleagues initiating a snowball sampling technique. An email or phone call reiterated the purpose of the study, the basis for the questionnaire, and the value of their participation.

Qualtrics was used to create an online demographic questionnaire. The questionnaire was given to 20 school personnel prior to the individual interviews and focus group sessions. Data from the questionnaire was collected, reviewed and analyzed. The questionnaire was a

preliminary exploration to better understand how study participants perceive the influence of FBA on classroom behaviors.

Participants' interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. Careful reading and re-reading revealed emerging themes and individual accounts of student discipline issues and personnel perceptions of FBA. Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2019) explained, "Overall, a theme is an extended phrase or sentence that identifies what a unit of data is about and or what it means" (p. 113). Allowing participants during interviews to objectively express their view of and role in the FBA process without coercing from this researcher achieved neutrality. Data collected through interviews and observations were read and re-read to identify categories and interpret themes of meaning. Brief notes will be recorded to reflect any nuances that audiotaping cannot reflect.

The IEP, IAT, and members participated in this study. These members were more likely to have familiarity with the FBA process. General educators are at the frontline of student behavior issues and are tasked with the daily work of academics and classroom management. Conducting interviews with general educators is essential to understanding their experiences with student behavior challenges and their perception of FBA as a useful tool for identifying the purpose or function of unwanted actions.

The individual interviews took place outside of the district's campuses. The consent form was explained and obtained prior to the interviews. The individual interviews will take place at a local business conducive to discussion. This researcher and the participant were present for the individual interviews. An audio-recorder, notepaper for the interviewee, and a physical copy of the semistructured, open-ended statements were available. The interview exploratory statements connected to the research questions. Finally, the probing and clarifying questions ended the individual interviews. The interviewee was ensured of this researcher's best efforts to maintain

confidentiality. Lastly, an overview of the study and the anticipated time for the release of the research data was provided.

The focus group sessions took place at a convenient location within the city. The focus group lasted no more than 60−90 minutes. The open-ended statements primarily guided the discussion. The open-ended statements were framed to answer the research question. Focus group members were recruited from questionnaire respondents. The focus group consisted of targeted school personnel, school psychologist, intervention specialist, and general educators. There were five participants including the researcher in the first focus group. The second focus group consist of six participants including the researcher. The goal was to explore the phenomenon of FBA until data saturation or information becomes repetitive within different groups. Notes were taken of the individual and focus group interviews and study participants transcripts. Notes were organized in a database and coded by the researcher utilizing an online program.

Focus groups, interviews, and questionnaires were used as data sources for a deeper understanding of the FBA phenomenon. Janesick (2015) explained, “the collection of evidence must be thorough, relevant, and sufficient, and it must be triangulated” (p. 61). IDEA mandates conducting an FBA in certain student behavior situations. IDEA does not provide specific content, or forms nor does it restrict who can implement an FBA. Although, FBA content may not be uniformed throughout school districts across the country. There are certain steps that can be found in the majority of FBA. IDEA directives expect preventive efforts from school district personnel to support all students regardless of an identified disability.

Once IRB approval was obtained it was important as a novice researcher to properly manage the data (Miles et al., 2019). Familiar programs Word and Excel were used to support

data management within limits. Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) was more resourceful and efficient. The researcher maintains data in several databases as a backup.

Identification of Attributes

FBA is a process that departs from traditional responses to student problem behavior (Scott & Alter, 2017; Scott & Cooper, 2017). For example, among the positive attributes of this study are the process of changing student challenging behavior by identifying the purpose and function of behavior that is maintained or extinguished. Identifying the purpose and function of problem behavior replaces the punitive responses that often lead to repeated suspensions and expulsions.

The FBA process is a tool for key personnel and general educators to address problematic student behaviors beyond the traditional negative consequences. As school personnel are trained in and utilize FBA, educator knowledge is increased, and best practices as identified by IDEA are addressed for special populations. Another essential attribute of this study is the body of literature that supports the benefit of FBA as a strategy for identifying the purpose or function of behavior for the general student population or unidentified IDEA within the classroom (Oakes et al., 2018; Young et al., 2018; Young & Martinez, 2016).

In addition, as the exploration of how school personnel perceived FBA continued, an important attribute that defines this study was the approaches for data collection. An initial general survey was distributed to capture FBA knowledge of school personnel. Interviews were conducted with specific participants. Among the specific interviewees were school psychologists and intervention specialists. These individuals are more likely to have experienced FBA as part of their work (Chezan et al., 2018; Loman & Horner, 2014; O'Neill, Bundock, Kladis, &

Hawken, 2015). General educators were included as interviewees because a significant body of research focuses on classroom behavior and the value of FBA.

Data Analysis Procedures

The focus of this qualitative case study was to explore how school personnel perceived FBA. Data sources were responses from questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups. Holloway and Brown (2016) cautioned researchers to "ground your analysis in the data" (p. 86). Paying close attention to identify quotations and field notes are ways to acknowledge "the analytic point being made" (Holloway & Brown, 2016, p. 86). The following steps were used in this study to analyze the data. First, the data collected were organized according to the type of information and the date collected and were reviewed for clarity. Coding data will be stored in Word documents and Excel and Google spreadsheets. Recorded transcripts from participant interviews were transcribed, reviewed and studied to determine categories and themes. Identifying categories and themes during the data analysis process aids in answering the research question. Themes and categories emerged from the coding procedures. In vivo coding was useful because of the importance of this study's purpose to explore how school personnel experience FBA. In vivo coding focuses on the actual verbal responses of the participants.

Data analysis primary step is coding. Saldaña (2016) described a coding cycle with two groups of methods. Two coding procedures selected from Saldaña's (2016) cycle groups for this study are listed under the Elemental and Affective methods. Although, In Vivo and Values were used as coding methods: The initial coding step for this study included manual and the use of a frequency table (Miles et al., 2019). The code frequency table was used throughout the data analysis beginning with the responses to the questionnaire. As the sources of data were read and reread in the analysis process codes were connected to themes. Next, similarities between the

coded responses (questionnaires, interviews and focus groups) will be identified. A codebook was maintained to analyze themes that emerge from the questionnaires, transcribed interviews and focus group sessions. In vivo coding is recognized as a quality method and useful for novice qualitative researchers (Miles et al., 2019). Using In Vivo coding emphasized study participants' words and collected familiar jargon that connects school personnel to their FBA practice and brought meaning to the labels that emerged from the interviews and focus groups (Manning & Kunkel, 2014).

Miles et al. (2019) described data analysis as a series of three activities, data condensation, data display and conclusion drawing /verification. Miles et al.'s (2019) data condensation activity views coding as meaningful "prompts or triggers" that bring meaning. More specifically, data condensation is a "task that enable you to retrieve the most meaningful material, assemble data that go together, and further condense the bulk into readily analyzable units" (Miles et al., 2019, p. 104). It is important to note that data condensation continues until the end of the study. Another activity is a data display. As in data condensation, displaying data in an organized manner is essential to this activity. For example, deciding on how data is displayed in the number of cells and rows selected.

The third activity conclusion drawing, and verifying was important to this study. From data collection to the end of the research interpretations attention should be given to "what things mean by noting patterns, assertions, propositions, explanations, and causal flows conclusions are held lightly, maintain openness and skepticism, but the conclusions are still there, vague at first, then increasingly explicit and grounded" (Miles et al., 2019, p. 39). Miles et al. (2019) described these activities as not separate from but a part of data analysis.

Technology supports as CAQDAS was a database resource that helped analyze, interpret and transcribe text collected within this study. Atlas.ti software was used to assist in coding and managing the sources of data. Yin (2018) explained that having varied case study databases as CAQDAS and basic Word or Excel documents increases reliability. A useful aspect of Atlas.ti is its programmable ability to allow the input of labels for bins and links (Miles et al., 2019).

The final step of data analysis for this study was a specific effort of supporting validity and credibility. Miles et al. (2019) explained that qualitative data analysis is continuous, iterative and about doing. A within-group analysis triangulated the data. The analysis will look at the responses of the specialists and general educators. The responses of these study participants (specialists and general educators) were analyzed separately to show any differences.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Research Design

This study explored how school personnel perceived the influence of FBA on classroom behaviors. General educators are often supported by specialized personnel when encountering challenging behaviors (Crone et al., 2015; Dunlap & Kern, 2018; Farmer et al., 2016; Hirsch et al., 2017; Shernoff et al., 2016). Limitations are outside of this researcher's control. Participants are truthful in their responses to the interview questions. This study also focused on a specific targeted group of school personnel. The following are three limitations were considered as precautions to ensure credibility.

1. This study was restricted to school personnel from an urban school district in the state of Ohio.
2. The researcher is a retiree with professional association with the study participants. Caution was taken to avoid researcher bias and ensure that findings or themes are accurately presented as shown in the emerging data. School personnel were not

pressured to participate because of their familiarity with this researcher. Likewise, participants in this FBA study received honest information about the study's purpose and benefits to their work. Confidentiality was clearly defined in the context of this study. Proceeding in a professional manner during this qualitative case study supported gaining information regarding how school personnel perceived FBA.

3. The sample size affects generalizability. Yet, transferability is possible.

FBA is a process mandated by IDEA to be implemented throughout United States school districts. Therefore, the perceptions that will be explored focused on school personnel as they have experienced the phenomenon of FBA. Further research that extends beyond the local school district may provide a larger sample that is more generalized in quantitative study methods. Although, this study does not have the generalizable features of a quantitative study. Transferability is possible as other school districts are able to connect to the experiences of school personnel. Qualitative data collection consisted of interviews conducted by this researcher with school personnel including school psychologists, intervention specialists, and general education teachers. Data were collected during the months of October and November 2019.

Delimitations are within the researcher's control to support the focus of this exploration and to best answer the research question.

1. School personnel responsible for conducting FBA or have a collaborative team role were selected for this study. For example, school psychologists, and intervention specialists were intentionally recruited. General educators were also among the targeted study participants because of their direct teaching responsibilities which included responding to student behavior challenges. Excluded from the study was school personnel with non-FBA or teaching responsibilities.

2. The questionnaire, interview, and focus group questions were developed and asked by the researcher.
3. The questionnaire consists of multiple-choice selections instead of open-ended statements. This kept data manageable and provided a quick comprehensive glance at the overall general population.

IDEA does not stipulate a specific FBA format that should be utilized. However, there are consistent steps that are identified throughout the body of literature that suggested best practices. Direct and indirect observation, historical data, teacher and parent behavior inventories, and student feedback are all essential ways of obtaining information. This information helps identify antecedents, behaviors, and consequences. How participants experience these components is also key to data collection and analysis within this bounded system.

Validation

Further, it is important as a researcher to ensure as best possible the credibility and dependability of the data that was collected. Validation is more than gaining the perspectives of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Triangulation of multiple data sources, engaging in reflexivity and being aware of researcher biases support validity (Miles et al., 2019). Having study participants review the data collected and findings strengthens construct validity (Yin, 2018). Providing an opportunity for member checking of the data by the study participants enhanced trustworthiness.

Credibility

In addition, peer debriefing takes place by conversing with school personnel involved in FBA and student discipline issues. The discussions' recorded data along with field notes of

participants supported these criteria to ensure truth, value, and validity. There will be a follow up with study participants, and statements to solicit clarification of comments will be used during interviews. As previously stated, this is a member-checking strategy or component of validation measures (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Dependability

Structural relationships were accomplished by interviewing a range of school personnel responsible for FBA and servicing students with disabilities. These prior identified validation components, referential materials, and structural relationships, as well as the other cited strategies, would assist in leaving an audit trail for replication, applicability, and generalizing across studies if desired. Although aggregate generalizability was difficult because the composition of IEP team members varied according to IDEA (2004) and other previous amendments, some aspect of generalizability was assumed.

Sources of data that are reliable strengthen dependability. Maintaining a codebook and comparing notes with another coder (Creswell & Poth, 2018) supported reliability. This researcher did not use an intercoder or additional researcher. A codebook was maintained, varied sources of data gathered, and member checks will support dependability. This researcher made a deliberate effort to provide an accurate account of how school personnel perceived the influence of FBA on classroom behaviors. Careful selection of data sources an accurate interpretation and reporting of findings strengthened dependability and credibility.

Expected Findings

As specific validation precautions were employed, credibility and dependability were supported from the emerging data. The purpose of this study was in the forefront to pursue the

answer to the research question. Furthermore, it is understood that this researcher may hold certain biases that may reflect in a discussion of expected findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

This study explored how school personnel perceived FBA. FBA has a foundation in ABA, which focuses on understanding and changing challenging behavior (Gable et al., 2014; Lewis et al., 2017; Moreno et al., 2017). Historically, the process of determining the function or purpose of, as well as the prediction, maintaining or extinction of behavior can be found in the earlier work of Watson and Skinner. Watson developed the term behaviorism. Skinner expanded on the term similarly studying and predicting behavior. Observation of their subjects in the direct environment was an essential part of Watson and Skinner's work. It was expected that school personnel who observed student behavior with the goal of identifying the purpose or function of behavior would be able to develop an FBA that leads to an effective BIP.

School personnel who are utilizing the FBA process are observing students to find the connection between challenging behaviors and the environment. In addition, expected findings supported the FBA literature that training is important and implementation with fidelity is crucial (Borgmeier et al., 2017; McCahill et al., 2014; Young & Martinez, 2016). Among the concerns of researchers is the reality that conducting an FBA with fidelity is not an instant process. However, with training general educators can learn to identify the function of behavior leading to a decrease or extinction of problematic actions. As an effort to support non-specialized educators the FBA process can be truncated. It was expected that training would reduce office referrals and decrease suspensions and expulsions. In the end, it was expected that the emerging data will confirm the behavioristic theoretical framework presented in this study. Lastly, the expected findings did not bring new knowledge to the larger field of education. Yet, it is expected that the findings will be specific to the study participants and their school district. This study's results

confirmed previous research findings. The data filled a gap in the FBA implementation process and provided new knowledge.

Ethical Issues

Conflict of interest assessment. Ethical issues to consider when conducting qualitative research include assessing for conflicts of interest. The researcher participated in the Concordia University–Portland IRB process to obtain approval for this study. There were no financial benefit nor incentives provided for participation in this study. The researcher received no monetary or financial benefits for conducting this study.

Researcher's position. There are positive aspects of having access and connections to the worksite and participants in which your study will take place. Creswell and Poth (2018) provided a "cautionary note about studying one's own organization" (p. 154). This researcher was conscious of any unanticipated biases that may challenge the data. The validation procedures within the data collection process addressed Creswell and Poth's concerns. These authors further state, "When it becomes important to study one's own organization or workplace, we typically recommend that multiple strategies of validation be used to ensure that the account is accurate and insightful" (p. 154). Hence, is why this researcher will employ at least two of Creswell and Poth's validation strategies for a sound, dependable, and trustworthy qualitative study.

Ethical issues in the study. The researcher is a retired employee with professional associations with the study participants. Procedures were taken to avoid personal biases and decrease any participant felt pressure from colleague familiarity. This qualitative case study took place in a naturalist setting. This study was conducted to explore how school personnel perceived FBA and was bounded by that specific system. This researcher conveyed data objectively and as the findings emerge from the research.

The data are unstructured for example observations, interviews, review of documents (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012). Seeking the perception of study participants in this qualitative study involved conducting interviews. Respect of participant responses and careful field notes was taken to provide an accurate account of the findings and emerging themes.

Informed consent was obtained from participants prior to the individual interviews and focus group sessions. A consent form was attached to the Qualtrics demographic questionnaire emailed to each participant. Specifics of the study's purpose and procedures were discussed with the participants.

Confidentiality. To use the upmost professional ethics while pursuing answers to this study's research question. Participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identity. Assigning pseudonyms to the district and school personnel was an effort to maintain confidentiality throughout and after the study. Familiar programs Word and Excel were password protected and used to support data management and storage. Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) will be more resourceful and efficient. Materials that were collected for this study was securely stored. These materials will be destroyed after 3years after the study's conclusion.

Chapter 3 Summary

Study participants are facing the same challenges that many school personnel across the country face, complying and implementing with fidelity the IDEA disciplinary mandates. In accordance with IDEA directives, if a student's challenging behavior interferes with his learning and the learning of others, an FBA is to be conducted and a function-based BIP should be implemented. Walker and Barry (2017) explained, "If educators, who hold the primary responsibility for implementing the BIP, do not understand the complexities of these tools, it

is unreasonable to expect them to implement such a plan with integrity (p. 12). The purpose of this study was to explore how specific school personnel perceived the influence of FBA on classroom behaviors.

Chapter 3 presented the methodology that was used to explore the FBA phenomenon as perceived by specific school personnel. A qualitative case study design was used. Yin (2018) advised that when determining the type of research to pursue and the focus is contemporary rather than a historical concern, case study research is appropriate. The methods used to carry out this qualitative case study was discussed in this chapter and presented in detail in Chapter 4. To answer the research question, a demographic questionnaire was distributed to 20 respondents. In addition, individual interviews and focus group meetings were conducted. The researcher presents in Chapter 4 how the data was collected, analyzed and the results are revealed.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore how school personnel (school psychologists, intervention specialists, and general educators) perceived the influence of FBA on classroom behaviors. One research question guided the study: How do school personnel (school psychologists, intervention specialists, and general educators) perceive the influence of FBA on classroom behaviors? Specific school personnel participation was vital to this study as exploring their perspectives were important to understanding FBA implementation within the classroom. Conducting an FBA is not exclusive to developing a function based BIP (Hirsch et al., 2017).

This qualitative case study focuses on specific school personnel (school psychologists, intervention specialists, and general educators) who have direct or collaborative responsibility for conducting FBA. These specific participants were recruited because they were relevant to and supportive of answering the research question. The participants were recruited through snowball sampling. Snowball sampling as a process is used to identify potential participants that are not easily accessible including either hidden, vulnerable or marginalized populations (Ellard-Gray, Jeffrey, Choubak, & Crann, 2015; TenHouten, 2017).

Access to the study location was not granted therefore a snowball technique was used. Initial contact was made with school personnel who would participate in the study and identify other potential participants to come forward. The snowball sampling technique resulted in 20 participants overall, who completed a demographic questionnaire, participated in an individual interview or one of the focus group meetings. All participants completed the questionnaire, some participated in both an individual and focus group meeting.

Following this introduction, Chapter 4 will provide a brief explanation of the sample description, an analysis of the data, the summary findings, and a presentation of the data and results. An analysis of the data for this study provides the procedures used to code by organizing texts, categorizing data which exposed patterns and themes. The coding process provided a means to bring together a comprehensive and detailed representation of participants' views. Data were collected during individual interviews and focus group meetings. All participants completed a demographic questionnaire. The perspectives of the participants were crucial data sources that is disclosed in the findings and the results sections to answer the research question. Lastly, a concluding summary highlighting key findings will follow the chapter 4 discussion.

Description of the Sample

The participants in this qualitative case study were specific school personnel (school psychologists, intervention specialists, and general educators). The selected participants have direct or collaborative responsibility for conducting FBA. The participants were recruited using snowball sampling. The use of a snowball sampling technique resulted in 23 contacts with 20 school personnel coming forward to engage in the study by participating in an interview or focus group. Two participants wanted to be involved in an interview and attend a focus group. All recruits identified through snowball sampling were willing to complete the demographic questionnaire.

The demographic questionnaire (see Table 1) show that three of the 20 respondents were employed with their district for at least 31 years, eight respondents were employed for 21 to 30 years, five employed for 11 to 20 years, one respondent employed six or fewer, and three respondents were employed five or fewer years.

Table 1

Participants' Demographic Data

Participant Pseudonym	Years in Current Position	Years with District	Highest Education Level
GE#1	21–30 years	21–30 years	Master's degree
GE#2	11–20 years	31–over	Master's degree
GE#3	21–30 years	21–30 years	Master's degree
GE#4	31–over	31–over	Master's degree
GE#5	6–10 years	21–30 years	Master's degree
GE#6	21–30 years	21–30 years	Bachelor's degree
GE#7	6–10 years	6–10 years	Doctorate degree
GE#8	21–30 years	21–30 years	Master's degree
GE#9	11–20 years	11–20 years	Master's degree
IS#1	11–20 years	11–20 years	Master's degree
IS#2	21–30 years	21–30 years	Master's degree
IS#3	1 or less–5 years	1 or less–5 years	Bachelor's degree
IS#4	6–10 years	21–30 years	Bachelor's degree
IS#5	11–20 years	11–20 years	Bachelor's degree
IS#6	1 or less–5years	1or less–5 years	Master's degree
IS#7	31–over	11-–20 years	Master's degree
IS#8	1 or less–5 years	11–20 years	Master's degree
SP#1	1 or less–5 years	1 or less–5 years	Master's degree
SP#2	21–30 years	21–30 years	Master's degree
SP#3	31–over years	31–over	Master's degree

The demographic questionnaire included a different final question not displayed in Table 1. The researcher wanted to present the participant responses separately because Question #5 related to student behavior. The question was exploratory related to FBA that would provide a glimpse at the participants' experiences with student behavior. The premise of this study is based on an argument supporting the literature that FBA, when conducted with fidelity, is an effective intervention for decreasing or extinction of student challenging behavior in the classroom (McCahill et al., 2014; Trussell, Lewis, & Raynor, 2016; Walker & Barry, 2017). As noted in the following Qualtrics report in Table 2, 19 respondents (95%) experienced challenging behavior(s) that did not respond to their classroom management strategies or interventions. The one participant who responded no to question five was in her first year of teaching.

Table 2

Summary of Responses to Question 5: Have you encountered student challenging behavior(s) that did not respond to your classroom management strategies or interventions?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	95.00%	19
2	No	5.00%	1
	Total	100%	20

Note. Qualtrics report.

The participants in this study are employed in an urban school district within a small midwestern city. The participants represented a multi-cultural and diverse age group of school personnel. These participants also serve a diverse population of students with varied economic and social demographics. The study selection criteria specifically, roles of the school personnel were important to explore the phenomenon and answer the research question.

Research Methodology and Analysis

Design. A qualitative case study design was employed to answer the research question. A qualitative case study design was needed to understand the experiences of school personnel through their own voices. Exploring the FBA phenomenon disclosed participants' experiences through honest dialogues. Qualitative case study research is more flexible and less restrictive than conducting quantitative methods that also provide important statistics (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Yet, qualitative case study designs allow for specific data through personal interactions with the sample population experiencing the phenomenon. Yin (2018) explained, "case study research can free you from being constrained by overly restricted rules" (p. 198). Having chosen a qualitative case study design the researcher was able to answer the research question: How do school personnel (school psychologists, intervention specialists, and general educators) perceive

the influence of FBA on classroom behaviors? The qualitative case study design procedures included direct conversations with study participants.

In order to answer the research question: How do school personnel (school psychologists, intervention specialists, and general educators) perceive the influence of FBA on classroom behaviors? This qualitative case study used research methods that included nine individual interviews and two focus group meetings. Phase I included a demographic questionnaire. Overall, twenty school personnel matching the recruitment criteria responded to the questionnaire.

Questionnaire. The demographic questionnaire provided specific background characteristics of the study population. The demographic questionnaire provided an initial context to identify specific school personnel and support data analysis. Snowball sampling was used to identify the study participants. The initially recruited participants reached out to colleagues that met the study criteria. The supporting participants informed potential school personnel about the study. The researcher was either emailed, texted or personally provided contact information (with their consent) for the potential participants. Potential participants were contacted to confirm their interest and were given brief information about the study. All study participants were assigned a pseudonym that would identify them within the Qualtrics platform and all data collection sources. Twenty participants were sent the Phase I demographic questionnaire via their personal emails. All participants clicked consented to complete the questionnaire and participate in the study. There was a 100 % completion rate for those school personnel once contacted and agreed to participate in the study in some capacity. Appendix A lists the demographic questions. The participants represented and held one of the school personnel roles wanted to explore the research question.

Interviews. Nine individual interviews were conducted during Phase II of the study. All individual interview participants read and signed a physical consent form prior to the interview. The individual interviews took place at library meeting rooms and local businesses. School psychologists, intervention specialists, and general educators responded to open-ended, semistructured interview questions. The individual interviews were privately held. The average individual interview lasted approximately 40 minutes. The individual interviews were audio-recorded. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described the use of semistructured and open-ended questions as flexibly used and allow interviewees to "define the world in unique ways" (p. 116).

Focus groups. Phase III consisted of two focus group meetings held at a local historical woman's club. All focus group participants read and signed consent prior to the discussion. Participants were directed to avoid giving names yet have the freedom to speak openly and honestly. The focus group attendees were general educators, intervention specialists, and school psychologists. A mix of male and female school personnel gave their perspectives about student behavior and the use of FBA in the classroom. Open-ended, semi-structured questions guided the focus group meetings. The meetings were held within the same week lasting at least 60 minutes each. The second focus group lasted 70 minutes. As with the individual interviews, the focus group meetings were also audio recorded. The focus group meetings were kept small five to six attendees including the researcher. It was important for the researcher not to project any biases during the focus group discussions (Rothwell, Anderson, & Botkin, 2016). A member check was conducted by emailing a copy of their transcript to support the study's accuracy and credibility. Data from the individual interviews and focus group meetings were maintained in locked storage and computer files were password protected.

Coding and analysis. The demographic questionnaire, individual interviews and focus group meetings provided a collection of rich data. The individual interviews and focus group discussions were recorded. Audio files from the voice recorders were copied to a computer. The copied audio files were uploaded to Rev.com for transcribing. Two options were used, machine rough draft and human (professional) transcribing. The individual interviews were machine transcribed. The focus groups were professionally transcribed. This researcher felt professional transcribing of the focus group would provide a better output because of multiple speakers.

Upon receiving the transcripts for both groups corrections were needed. The individual interviews and focus group transcripts were read and reread. Corrections were time-consuming but necessary to relate the participants' perspectives and present an accurate presentation of the findings. As revisions were made manual ideas were jotted down along the margin of the transcripts. Rereading the transcripts in the revised form allowed this researcher to begin the coding process and direct analysis. Prior to First Cycle coding, inductive manual coding was completed to become familiar with the data.

First Cycle methods used were Open and In Vivo coding. All transcripts were uploaded to the Document section of Atlas.ti. Open coding was initiated for the transcripts. Comments were attached to text segments that would be discussed in the study. Emerging codes were also organized in Atlas.ti. For some of the texts in vivo coding was applied simultaneously while Open coding. All documents are coded using in vivo coding within Atlas.ti.

Saldaña (2016) explained that in vivo coding is words or phrases expressed directly or verbatim by the participant. Open and in vivo coding resulted in 47 codes. There was text that applied to Values codes. Values codes expressed participants' attitudes and beliefs. Participants expressed specific beliefs and attitudes when discussing their perspectives about the plight of

students. Challenges within a student's family dynamics or home life was perceived as a contributing factor toward problem behaviors within the classroom. Young and Martinez (2016) found teachers had several beliefs or attitudes about the reason for student problem behaviors within the classroom including family and home situations. The final data analysis resulted in four theoretical constructs and 10 supporting themes.

Miles et al. (2019) described, "Codes are labels that assign symbolic meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study" (p. 105). The 47 codes that resulted from the individual interviews and focus group transcripts were organized according to responses given. Codes were reviewed, another analysis found the need to delete codes decreasing to a manageable group that allowed categorizing. The groupings became a cluster of supportive themes from researcher generated theoretical constructs (Saldaña, 2016). The resulting four theoretical constructs and 10 supporting themes are displayed with corresponding example quotes in Table 2.

A within-group analysis between the perceptions of the intervention specialists and general educators was made. To complete this task an additional round of coding was completed. The goal of this additional coding of the individual interviews for the intervention specialists and general educators was to reveal probable differences or similarities in their perceptions. The analysis of these two roles revealed unique perceptions regarding FBA. Yet, revealed were also perceptions according to their experiences that were similar. During the focus group meetings, the collective group (school psychologists, intervention specialists, and general educators) responded to another set of semi-structured questions. Everyone participating in the focus group dialogue responded to the same specific focus group questions. The emerging data from the

focus groups are also displayed in Figure 1 and included in the theoretical constructs and supporting themes to be discussed in detail in the Summary of the Findings.

Table 3

Codes to Themes

Codes	Themes	Example Quotes
Prevalent Behaviors	Student behavior can be simple, complex, varied	IS#2: "Inattention. I think lack of focus. It's hard for them to stay on task until it's completed and then they go around the room and then they'll disrupt. But I think that lack of focus is, the biggest problem."
Interventions & Support	Checklists, observations, IAT & specialized personnel	GE# 3: "Generally, if I have referred a student because of behavior, the checked off list comes and then an observation comes and that's pretty much as far as I'm concerned. I don't know what happens after that."
PBIS	Incentives, CHAMPS, building relationships	GE#1: "Well we, we give a lot of incentives. Anything to get the children to do what it is that you want them to do. So, we find ourselves . . . they come to school, you get an incentive, you get your homework done, you get an incentive. So, you know, everything is based on incentives today. GE#2: "I know you were told about the CHAMPS. CHAMPS is something that's been added . . . some people trained, they're supposed to come back and train us." GE#6: "But I knew his history and I said, "my man, you don't have to ever take anything. All you have to do is ask me." And we built a good relationship after that. And then the following year, he was in my class.
Training	Occurs where there is knowledge	IS#5: "It's a means . . . understanding the behavior of the kids. What's the function of their behavior, what can be done to resolve the behavior issue?"
	Occurs when there is training	IS #3: "I really haven't had any training. I hope to go to some professional development days to get some actual training." Is#4: "At a college level, we had several classes as part of our intervention specialist class, a whole class that was just on basically assessments and Functional Behavior Assessments." IS#5: Had several trainings about FBA and BIP. "From the district the latest training I had, not FBA and BIP, but related to how to handle or help kids in ED or emotionally disturb class. And during the training we were trained how to, sort of install systems in the classroom that would help . . . help the kids with their behavior."

Summary of the Findings

In this qualitative case study, the researcher explored school personnel (school psychologists, intervention specialists, and general educators) perception of FBA influence on classroom behaviors. Comprehensively, the study found that school personnel perceived conducting an FBA as time-consuming. General educators were more likely to attribute FBA to checklist and observations. Intervention specialists and school psychologists were more familiar with the terms FBA and BIP. Intervention specialists and school psychologists were more likely to have conducted or participated in the FBA process. One intervention specialist had not conducted an FBA. Also, only one intervention specialist during the individual interviews stated having FBA training during their preservice college preparation. The participants reported that their district is currently providing FBA training during professional development days. Collectively, study participants believed that training would be helpful to address problem behaviors. Knowing your students, building a relationship and years of experience was also found to be helpful according to participants. School psychologists were experienced and conducted FBA leading to a BIP more often.

In general, educators do not want to be excluded from addressing student challenging behaviors in their classrooms. Yet, general educators expressed that trained school personnel with specific skills are needed support persons and better able to address student challenging behavior. School personnel reported student behaviors displayed in the classroom varies. However, general educators differed in their confidence to identify the cause or purpose of a student's challenging behavior. Comprehensively, the study found that educators perceived that student challenging classroom behaviors displayed are caused by different variables, including family dynamics. Young and Martinez (2016) explained teachers who do not understand the

cause of student behavior and do not have training in FBA and ABA more often have presuppositions regarding student challenging behaviors.

PBIS was a strategy identified by all interviewed and focus group participants. Although conducting an FBA is a component of PBIS at the third tier, general educators did not connect the two terms. Comprehensively, all school personnel discussed PBIS in terms of working toward a positive school climate where incentives and rewards are given. Study participants frequently connected CHAMPS implementation within classrooms to PBIS.

FBA as a federal mandate is required in specific circumstances to address students identified with special needs challenging behaviors in the classroom. Study participants during the data collection process described the type of student behaviors that are encountered in the classroom. Exploring the FBA phenomenon by gathering data from the demographic questionnaire, individual interviews and focus group meetings helped to answer the research question: How do school personnel (school psychologists, intervention specialists, and general educators) perceive the influence of FBA on classroom behaviors? The data provided from the questionnaire, individual interviews, and focus groups provided rich data during this exploration of their perceptions.

Saldaña's (2016) approach to analysis and coding by categorizing and grouping themes from theoretical constructs was used to present the data. Individual interviews and focus groups data were analyzed, categories are defined and relationships among the theoretical constructs and supporting themes are discussed. Saldaña (2016) explained that theoretical constructs are "researcher-generated" (p. 202). The following four theoretical constructs and 10 supporting themes emerged from the data and are discussed in the proceeding sections of this chapter.

Presentation of the Data and Results

The presentation of themes is not in any specific hierarchy or prevalence. Themes emerged from the participants' discussion providing data and a lens into their perception of how FBA influence classroom behavior. Individual interviews and focus group meetings provided a rich collection of data. Saldaña (2016) suggested an alternative approach to theming that categorizes and leads to "theoretical constructs" (p. 202). An analysis of the data revealed differences and similarities through theoretical constructs. A review of participants' perspectives from nine individual interviews and two focus group meetings resulted in four theoretical constructs and 10 connecting supportive themes. The dialogue of study participants revealed expertise and the misconceptions about FBA. Pseudonyms were provided for each participant for the following presentation of their perspectives from the data analysis. Figure 1 displays the final data analysis that resulted in four theoretical constructs and 10 supporting themes.

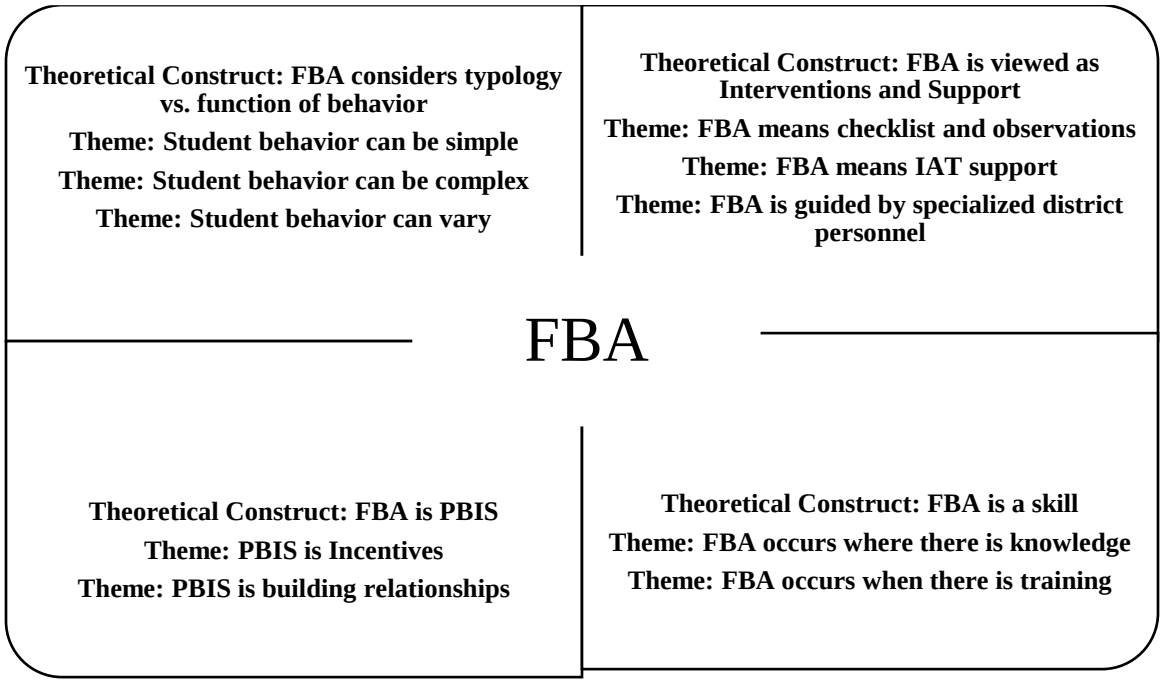

Figure 1. Theoretical constructs.

Theoretical construct: FBA considers typology vs. function of behavior.

***Theme: Student behavior can be simple*.** Some classroom problems expressed by educators were described as nothing challenging but off-task behaviors, for example, socializing. These behaviors are described in general as nothing complicated and usually easily redirected. At times, off-task behaviors can become more complicated and disruptive when it is repetitive keeping the student and others from learning. In the following comments, individual study participants described behaviors that are seen most often from their experiences. The researcher began the individual interviews by asking, "*What student behavior problem(s) have you found to be most prevalent in the classroom"?* Participant GE#2 described prevalent behavior most often experienced in the classroom as a lack of motivation in the form of socializing. "Socializing instead of being on task and completing work. The off-task behavior . . . is just . . . nothing outrageous. It's mostly just socializing and wasting time."

Participant GE#3 had a similar response but discussed different actions when describing prevalent behaviors as off-task explaining, "You see the most not being able to stay on task. So that means they get up a lot and talk a lot. So that's the most that I've seen. A lot of energy." IS#2 described off tasked behaviors as inattentiveness. IS#2 works with students with special needs and supports other educators in the role of a facilitator during collaborative team meetings. "Inattention. I think lack of focus. It's hard for them to stay on task until it's completed and then they go around the room and then they'll disrupt. But I think that lack of focus is, the biggest problem."

Participant IS#3 describes the most prevalent behavior also as off task. Yet, this participant described repetitive behaviors that can be more disruptive. For this participant who

explained, because of her expertise and role, the behaviors are considered off task. Other school personnel may see the following behaviors as more challenging as described by participant IS#3:

> In my classroom specifically, I think what I found most is . . . students being off task. I have one student in particular who touches others. No matter how much we ask him not to touch others, his . . . constantly touching and he's not the only one, but he's like more severe about it, but they all want to touch each other all the time without asking and some of them don't like it. So, I think touching each other, being off task and that's pretty much it.

Participant IS#3 further explained that one child hits and kisses, adding that "you have to redirect a lot of times." Participant IS#3 noted that these behaviors are expected because of her student population. The researcher found during the interviews that participants' perspectives differed when describing what behaviors are considered simple. As participant IS#3 expressed the participant's role (intervention specialist versus general educator) may account for their perspective of tolerable behaviors.

Theme: Student behavior can be complex. Participant GE#1 had 21 to 30 years' experience as an educator. Most concerning to this participant and observed most often in the classroom is being motivated. Participant GE#1 experience over the years has shown that some students come into the classroom with many complicated situations. Participant GE#1 expressed,

> Just the motivation, being motivated and wanting to learn. Sometimes I just think that students come with so many issues that, we may or may not understand. And so, things that are on their mind might block or be a hindrance of, you know, being open to learning and receiving . . . whatever it is that they need to get to be successful.

Participant IS#4 was also passionate about the plight of students and the behaviors displayed. Her collective years as a paraprofessional and now lead responsibility for a self-contained classroom. Participant IS#4 has learned from her experiences and gained insight that is the basis for her perspectives on student behaviors.

> My experience through the years is that students who, for some reason have fallen through the cracks, either socially or are a combination of not getting the right fundamental skills from home and wherever or maybe they have social issues where they're not able to get those, those are the students who exhibit behavior issues when you are trying to give them the same fundamental skills that they need. They would rather, instead of when you call upon them for an answer maybe in class and they do not know the answer, they would rather, instead of saying, I don't know, can you help me with it? They probably would be the ones who would act up or tell you to leave them alone because they don't want the other students to know that they are lacking these reading skills or math skills or whatever that they should already have.

Participant IS#4 continued:

> And, it's sad because you would like to be able to reach out and help them, but to them and being strong, it seems like they don't want even sometimes teachers to know, even though that, you know, they don't want you to really know what's going on socially in their lives. Maybe at home, you know, they're trying to protect their, their siblings, their families. Privacy and confidentiality, you know, they don't want you to look down upon them of course, and they don't realize that you probably just . . . as a teacher, you just want to help them and, and see if you could find resources to help them.

***Theme: Student behavior can vary*.** At times, school personnel may encounter student behaviors that vary and have different causes as the following participant described. Participant IS#1 explained, "I have one student that likes to get up and just run out without asking anybody. For example, participant IS #1 described a student asking to go to the restroom but would wander the hallways. Also, this participant noticed that student behavior varies when medication is not in compliance. Although parents choose to seize medication during the summer or for different reasons during the school year student actions may move between simple to complex behaviors.

Participant IS#5 is an experienced school personnel and described several student behaviors. Participant IS#5 has taught students with special needs for over 15 years. He describes student behaviors displayed in the classroom environment.

> Since I have been teaching kids in (deleted) the label is emotionally disturbed. Most of the behavioral problems I encounter is profanity from someone, violent behavior towards peers, threat to staff. Like, I'm going to beat you outside of the classroom and others outside of the school. You better be careful. I'm going to beat you up. Then, even throwing stuff inside the classroom, slapping other kids are those things every day, every day. It happens in my classroom and I would, try to be patient with them, motivating them. I don't holler, I keep my voice calm and level, but still they come to you and disrespect you. And it's prevailing . . . I can even see it in the hallway. Even the regular kids.

School psychologists are assigned to several buildings, so they have a wider view of behaviors within classrooms. An observation was expressed during the individual interview that behaviors differ within school buildings. Sometimes the differences are because of the dynamics

of the school for example magnet or themed focused. Students that attend certain schools may be more motivated to achieve and therefore display fewer challenging behaviors. A school psychologist stated, “a lot of the students in the magnet schools are highly motivated.

Also expressed by this interviewee that behaviors vary and can be problematic when assigned to address student behavior problems and support student reviews.

Theoretical construct: FBA is viewed as interventions and support. The second interview question, “*How would you describe Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBA)?”* The school psychologists and intervention specialists were more likely to use terms and procedures that connected with conducting an FBA. General educators were not familiar with the term but when discussing their collaborative role when addressing student challenging behaviors described procedures used in the FBA process. FBA, when conducted with fidelity, is a strategy that will assist in addressing student challenging behaviors in the classroom. Shultz, Havens, Gurney, and Burt (2017) explained,

> FBA is a broad set of strategies designed to assess the variables associated with the onset and reinforcement of problem behavior. Information gleaned from an FBA can be used to develop a function-specific intervention plan, one designed with the outcomes of problem behavior in mind. (p. 153)

As revealed in this study some school personnel are unfamiliar with the term FBA. More often, some participants view interventions as a checklist and observations. The IAT is seen as the primary support to begin the process of addressing student behaviors, engaging specialized districts, and building personnel. The following are comments from the study participants’ experiences.

***Theme: FBA means checklist and observations*.** Participant GE#1 stated, "We just have to do . . . an observation of what it is that we see. Sometimes there is a checklist of questions that you might have to answer, but I've never had to actually create anything myself." Participant GE#2 similarly stated but acknowledges that checklists and observations may not be enough,

> So, the assessment as far as, a teacher goes, are you talking about like the checklist that we have where we check off things of what different situations . . . And the checklist I think is too general. Before specific cases, like you mentioned, there's different situations for different kids. So, it's hard to generalize for all the kids. As far as observations, I'm not a fan of snapshot observations. I just think you don't get the whole picture unless you are visiting or observing for a length of time other than just coming in for 5 minutes. But then I, I'm not an expert of that. A person that can observe and make those kinds of assessments. So maybe they are better at it than I think they are.
>
> Generally, if I have referred a student because of behavior, the checked off list comes and then an observation comes and that's pretty much as far as I'm concerned. I don't know what happens after that.

Participant GE#3 was not familiar with the term FBA but when thinking it through also connected FBA to giving feedback about a student's behavior in some written or observational format. Participant GE#3 explained,

> I'm not familiar with it. It's been a long time. So, and I don't know if they called it that at the time, but when I've taken the child to intervention for behavior. Okay . . . it was a list and I had to . . . I guess that's what it was called . . . it was a threefold thing . . . So how would I describe that? Tedious.

Participant IS#1 is an educator with 11–20 years in her current position who specializes in working with students with special needs including autism.

> They (FBA) are time-consuming but, but they need to be . . . you got to cover all areas. We have forms that we have to fill out now and that makes it easier. And then we have team meeting . . . before and then we have team meetings during and then after, so we make sure that we get all access cause the parent or guardian is involved too . . . they need to know that's what we're doing . . . we're concerned about the child's behavior.

Participant IS#2 has 21–30 years in her position as an educator within a self-contained classroom. She is knowledgeable about FBA and has the skills to conduct or facilitate the process. Participant IS# 2 responded to the researcher's question by describing procedures for conducting an FBA.

> How would I describe them? . . . describe Functional Behavioral Assessment, that's where we look at. Usually, we will pick the top three behaviors and then focus on the one or find out what happens before to cause that behavior and then what happened . . . what we can do afterward to try and get the behavior under control. We have some . . . use a goal or an objective that we can measure to know for a meeting that . . . anything else.

The researcher wanted confirmation by asking, so you're looking specifically at certain behaviors? Participant IS#2 responded "certain behaviors" and continued,

> We'll fill out a form in that first one. We usually go to the top three (behaviors) and . . . then we'll order them in the one that's the most severe and we'll focus in on that one and we'll try and find the antecedent for it and then . . . what's causing it. And then trying to come up with some solutions to how we can help. And then we'll put a whole behavior plan behavior improvement plan for the student. After we get done, we'll give it to all the

teachers. He's in contact, he or she's in contact with to work on it. And then we meet, we'll keep data on the behaviors and then we'll . . . remeet usually like six weeks and discuss how it's going, if we need to tweak it . . . "

Theme: FBA means IEP and IAT support. General educators and intervention specialists (formerly known as special educators) seek the academic and behavioral support of IEP and IAT teams. These teams are usually represented by classroom teachers (general educators), intervention specialists, school psychologists, building administrators and a diverse representation of professionals that are involved with the student. The parent, referring school personnel, usually a teacher, or any invited support person may attend the IEP or IAT meetings. Although school personnel routinely seek support from IAT Burns, Riley-Tillman and Rathvon (2017) found that there are difficulties with these teams. Burns et al. (2017) explained that IAT do not tend to consider the classroom environment and function of the behavior. Also, teachers more often do not implement recommendations from the IAT.

Participant GE#1 explained,

You just have to refer the child to the team and explain, what concerns you might see for the reasons that you're bringing them to the team. You have to come up with a plan of action as to what you are going to be observing, from the child over a period of time so that you can document and then, you know, you go back to the team and revisit and retalk about what kind of interventions did you do? Did they work? Did they not? And then there might be further testing that might need to be done. So, it's a, it's a process and it's a lengthy process. It's not something that can happen overnight.

It helps when parents bring documentation if they've already had their child tested. That helps to expedite the process a little bit faster. But if not, then it can take time

> and it can take a year again it can take two years . . . they ask you to maybe retain the kid. And then I observed them another year. So, it just depends on what the kid is coming with and how much documentation has been made. If there had been a diagnosis made will depend on what an individual child will get and how long the process might take.

Each of the study participants had been a team member, consulted with, or was aware of IAT and IEP teams. The process and expectations of these teams varied in the experiences of study participants. Hartmann (2016) studied IEP teams and how they collaborated to support students with special needs. Hartmann (2016) focused on two elementary schools IEP members found new learning that identified situations that support and barriers to team practices as an effective or ineffective resource. The comments of GE #3 exemplify the difference in IAT and IEP team functioning:

> So, I don't even think our IAT been functioning . . . It's just, it's really splintered I don't know the process . . . if I just go to the . . . I do have another child that has been famous in our school for screaming blood-curdling screams and he's in the sixth grade and he has no IEP, no 504 and I just approached . . . and said I'd like to start an intervention process with him and he needs an IEP. He needs an IEP or a 504 to go with him cause he's going to middle school. But there needs to be a plan. And right now, the plan is just between his mom and me and then we kind of have an informal plan with the principal too. If he flips out someone's supposed to come and take them [class] out of the room. But generally, I haven't been involved in the process like an IAT team for years I don't even really know. I mean we have a loyal, psychologist that comes on his days, but, I don't even know the process to get him to start the assessment.

Theme: FBA is guided by specialized building and district personnel. School psychologists and intervention specialists were more often knowledgeable of the FBA process. There was only one intervention specialist new to the field that had not conducted an FBA. Six out of the seven individual interview and focus group study participants in the role of intervention specialists were knowledgeable and had facilitated or collaborated in the FBA process. As one of the school psychologists explained in their support role many FBAs are conducted. There are intervention specialists who are responsible for bringing the collaborative team and supporting documents together. Participant IS#2 explained,

> I'm usually the one that, sets up the meeting and fills it out and kind of lead, the meeting for it and bring everybody in. We used to have the psychologists and the teachers and principal and parents and if they're old enough, would have the student come in too and then, we'll all talk and get ideas and try and come up with a plan. So, I'm kind of like the facilitator. Though sometimes I'll do the observation too. If it's another student that's not mine, I'll go in the classroom to do the observation.

Participant IS#1 expressed her role in the FBA process as a lead person in a self-contained class and as a support person for colleagues.

> I mean it all depends . . . if it's for a kid in my class, I have to do documentation of his behaviors. It's even if there's a reason, like if I can put a reason behind his behavior. And mostly it's . . . you don't always know the cause when you have to write him up . . . I don't know . . . might be to avoid doing work or like the one student runs out of my room cause he didn't want to do work and I'm kind of like you need to sit down . . . you'll get free time on your computer if you . . . sit down and do this work.

Participant IS#3 explained, “Honestly, I don’t know how to describe them. I’ve never done one before. I know we’re supposed to be doing one. The school psychologist is supposed to be helping me though and we haven’t started it yet.” Study participant IS#3 is in the first year of this position. Participant GE#1is an experienced educator with a family history of educators conveyed the following,

> I think that the people that are more, qualified, it should be those that, handle the intervention because, you know, that’s what their background is about. So, they know more about those things. You know, I tell the kids, I’m the teacher, my job is to teach. But other people have roles that they play that, meet some of those needs. And I might not, you know, I do what I can, but I’m not, I didn’t go to school for that, so I’m not equipped like they are. So, I think that people with particular roles are better equipped to . . . I can only give . . . what I can bring, I think that motherly, the love and support. I just think that . . . when I talk to the kids, I talk to them like I would talk to my own children. And, I always tell the kids it doesn’t, it doesn’t take somebody to have to curse you out or whip you to get you to understand . . . listen to what I’m saying.

Participant GE#1 continued her perspective regarding student concerns,

> We have intervention specialists. We have school psychologists I feel as though those people, we have behavioral health support people. So, we do . . . qualified identified people to provide that support for him. Because they know, they know more about, the different behaviors and things like what makes the behaviors escalate, what calms them down. They have all the strategies. They know all of these things. So, I don’t know, I don’t care how many workshops they give. I still feel like those people that are trained in

> . . . have a better handle on how to deal with it. In an instant versus me trying to go pull out a pamphlet that you've given me some workshop on.

Theoretical construct: FBA is PBIS. PBIS was primarily discussed by study participants as incentives and rewards that are geared to motivate students toward cooperation and positive behaviors. Although, the specialized school personnel in the study may have been familiar with positive behavior supports it was still described in terms of incentives and rewards as implemented or directed by building administrators and district leadership. Bosworth and Judkins (2014) explained,

> SWPBIS is not a program, but rather a set of systems that define and teach appropriate behaviors, reinforce positive behaviors, discourage problem behaviors through consistent consequences, promote positive student-teacher interactions by focusing adult attention on positive behavior, and collect behavior data on which to base decisions (p.302).

The following are the perspectives of study participants as they have experienced PBIS.

Theme: PBIS is incentives. Participants were asked, *how has your school implemented PBIS?* Incentives were the initial responses of participants when discussing PBIS. School personnel-related incentives, rewards, and positives when identifying PBIS. Champs was also connected with the implementation of PBIS. For example, Participant GE#1 stated,

> Well we, we give a lot of incentives. Anything to get the children to do what it is that you want them to do. So, we find ourselves . . . they come to school, you get an incentive, you get your homework done, you get an incentive. So, you know, everything is based on incentives today. They may get rewarded with some kind of treat monthly. They may get rewarded with a field trip quarterly. So, everything is based on incentives. a field trip . . . maybe something fun like going skating or going bowling.

When asked, is it working? Participant GE#1 stated, “It does, it can, but we live in a world today where everything is based on what they can get. I don’t know if that’s a good thing.” Participant GE#2 also an experienced educator of students in a multi-age classroom. Participant GE#2 described incentives and recalled a student’s positive action,

> Instead of caught being good, you give them a ticket that’s caught being kind and you write down on the ticket and what they did. Oh, for instance, I had a student that one of the days as colder after some warm days when a student didn’t have a coat. He had a sweatshirt jacket and a coat. He gave his sweatshirt jacket to the other student. So, I gave him a caught being kind . . . reward. We have on the, let’s see, we have just started the VIP lunch program. Where teachers nominate students to eat at a special lunch table up on the stage and can invite a friend and they’re trying to make a big deal out of that and they have to get references from all the special teachers plus their homeroom teacher. So that has just been started.

Participant IS#1 reported that students also receive incentives for proper behavior in the form of Class Dojo, points, prizes, parties, free time and games. Participant IS #2 explained,

> The positive interventions to where . . . we have them for like attendance . . . We just had a skating party on Friday. We took K to sixth at the same time. This was for attendance. They can only miss two if they have two or less. And we had 400 students.
>
> Caught being good. Oh, I think that while we’re starting now, starting Monday, which we’ve done in the past, we have a special lunch table. I don’t know if you remember at (deleted school name) where they had a . . . where they would eat, there was that stage

It represents where they had been good, where they would eat . . . They have like a stage,

So, they put a special table out there and if you're like caught being good, if, if your behavior really is good then you can eat up on the stage and you can pick anybody you want to come up and eat. And the kids love that Yes, for good behavior and they love it. They just get to sit up there and talk. And they do birthday announcements. I mean they really tried to make the community there at our school seemed like more of a family.

Participant IS#3 explained PBIS as implemented in her classroom and at the school level.

Our school does PBIS . . . the positive behavior. PBS or PSC, I think they call it PSC. So, every two weeks they have a PSC event. So, if the students like they have to get 80% of their points per week. So, 50 points is like the total amount they have to get 80% of 50, and then if they get there 80% of their points. And I use Class Dojo to keep track of it. Some teachers use like a spreadsheet. I use Class Dojo. If they get 80%, then they get to attend the PSC event. In my classroom personally. I also like to do my own, so I have a star chart. If they get four stars a week. They can get into my treasure box . . . and then I . . . do like high fives because they really like that. I mean just little stuff like that, too.

Participant IS#4 expounded on PBS implementation,

All right. They have a team at the school level and then a team at the district level. So far this year or not, I don't know if we're at the beginning of the year. I have not per se met with anybody. I know they came into the room, the building leadership team to observe if you have your positive behavior incentives in your room and our room, we do have an incentive on Friday for movie and popcorn. So, if your behaviors and your work is done. So, I think . . . you have your rules displayed in a positive way. That is what they are encouraging every classroom they do at our school is to have that. And then at the

school level, they have incentives through the positive behavior . . . this past Friday we had bubbles and ice cream floats for if you had perfect attendance.

Participant IS#4 also described her own specific classroom incentives,

> everyday students can earn five points for following the rules and of course for being there. So, if they have in between 20 and 25 points, they get a smiley face. They carry that on the chart for listening ears . . . and then we have the visuals because they do have autism. We have the pictorial support to go with the rules that are constantly display. And if they get all those between 20 and 25 points, then they earn the movie. So, it's kinda like on a day to day, minute to minute basis that they have to keep that as part of their conscious . . . no I don't need to throw this fit or that's gonna remove some of my points. But they are doing pretty good. They really are.

Participant IS#5 describes PBIS as incentives also, "It's been going on for years, going on for years. They give rewards for positive behavior every month and they announce it, the students know about it. So that is part of our motivation." IS#5 gave other examples of positives students receive. Attending a basketball game, popcorn in the gym and movies. IS#5 has incentives in his classroom also, students can receive specific candy for completing work. There are additional incentives for completing MindPlay reading if his students hit 100% fidelity within a certain timeframe they are rewarded.

CHAMPS which is a classroom management program was also mentioned by study participants and associated with PBIS. CHAMPS according to study is a directive where school personnel across the district are expected to implement. Participant GE#2 stated,

> And I believe it's across the board that everybody is using those same codes. And I know you were told about the CHAMPS. CHAMPS is something that's been added . . . some

people trained, they're supposed to come back and train us. But to me it's another level of stuff on top of class Dojo points that are sent home to parents, which get positives and negatives on top of our . . . manners board. So why, you know, you get so many of those programs and the kids lose track.

Participant GE#3 also referred to CHAMPS as a part of PBIS implementation.

Well, it's just like everything else. It's kinda thrown at us that professional development or for an hour at the beginning of the year . . . things are pretty much scattered, you know, this year hasn't, it hasn't been as regiment, like we have to, like in years past we've had to have the____ statement or this year it's called CHAMP. And we are supposed to have representation of CHAMP everywhere.

***Theme: PBIS is building relationships*.** Overall, the study participants believed building positive relationships with students was important. Further expressed during the individual interviews and focus group meetings, participants observed that having a positive relationship with a student can be proactive and helps when disruptive behavior is displayed to gain the cooperation deescalating the problem. GE#1 explained,

You're right. I think building relationships is important and you got to keep going and look beyond the behavior and try to understand to what, what they might be going through and you do a lot of talking, you do a lot of talking, a lot of teaching life lessons and you just, you just spend so much time, you know, talking to kids about a life lesson.

I think it goes even beyond like, you got to love . . . it has to be your passion.

Theoretical construct: FBA is a skill.

***Theme: FBA occurs where there is knowledge*.** The following is an excerpt from an individual interview with study participant IS#4 who is knowledgeable of an experienced with conducting FBA. Participant IS#4 noted,

> Functional Behavior Assessment is a very necessary and very, it produces a lot of good results when you do it. I don't think it's done enough because it can be time consuming. But you definitely need to keep track of occurrences and what causes those occurrences so that you can, you can analyze the data and use that to find a solution for the student.
>
> You know, if something is triggering that behavior that you can solve, then you can remove it and eliminate it. So, I really, really think functional behavior is important, not just in a regular classroom or general ed setting, but especially in rooms for autism or any student with special needs that's having behaviors. I'm sorry.

The researcher responded,

> No, this is great. Thank you for realizing about the general ed teachers being able to do that. So, very good. Thank you. So, it sounds like you're aware of Functional Behavioral Assessments. "*What has been your role when an FBA is needed?"*

Participant IS#4 replied,

> When an FBA is needed. I need to conduct . . . if it's not a student that I'm familiar with especially, but even sometimes with the student I am familiar with, I need to conduct background information and maybe teachers that that student had before or assistant teachers, paraprofessionals that that student was around sometime going to the school they were previously . . . and obtaining information from that school as to, as far as their setting, stimulus that was around them that could be affecting their behavior.

All of those types of things before I even start doing my own things to see what is, what was happening at the time that behavior occurred. How often did that behavior occur, but specifically what was happening prior to and after the antecedent? . . . it's just amazing sometimes. What is that behavior? What happened? Um, one little boy in my room if his brother comes to have his diaper changed from an upper-grade level . . . and I noticed that nobody saw this but him and me, that the little boy was standing there where he could see him and that triggered him because as they fight at home. So, but nobody knew. The only thing that we did know was the speech person had come in and asked that he come to his regular speech and he just . . . floor and had a major tantrum. And my observation is that it was his seeing his brother from the corner of his eye. Maybe they had a thing the night before or something. But yeah, I think you have to do all of that. And then you have to keep thorough records. And when you compare your notes and your comments and your records, you can come up with something that will help that student, you know, which is the ultimate goal.

Observing and actually keeping . . . Functional Behavior Assessment . . . those records. There are different forms that you can use. But, if you jot the notes down at the time or like occurrences and what was happening, as you said, the antecedent and the, if you jot down and keep accurate notes, it's, it's hard, but it's easier to go back and look upon after something has happened. If you have an ongoing record of that behavior and when it's occurring, what time it's occurring, what's going on, how, everything that's happening during their, whatever their behavior may be.

The researcher replied,

Right. Participant IS#4: And whatever triggered that behavior. If you have more detailed records, then you can do a better job of maybe eliminating that behavior in the future. And you know, seeing if it comes back, if you can scaffold things, you tried different interventions and pull back and scaffold . . . if it changes or as maybe totally eliminated the behavior.

Participant IS#5 also described FBA and included a crucial part of the process not addressed in the previous dialogue with IS#4. A review of the literature found that a BIP based on the function of the behavior is essential in decreasing or extinguishing student challenging behavior. Participant IS#5 understands,

It's a means . . . understanding the behavior of the kids. What's the function of their behavior, what can be done to resolve the behavior issue? What follow up they have to do to ensure that the, there's progress or not. And after the behavior assessment, you prepare the behavior intervention plan and it runs for I think 45 days. Then you have to sit down again and meet with the IEP team, including the parents and students.

***Theme: FBA occurs when there is training*.** Study participants depending on their position have attended FBA focused training. General educators have the option to attend FBA training during their district provided professional days. Intervention specialists and school psychologists, in general, reported having FBA training as a district option or directive. FBA training included reading scenarios and developing as a group or individual strategies to address student challenging behaviors. GE #2 reported,

I've had one training in trauma that deals with the triggers with trauma and how to deal with, not push and recognizing the triggers.

> And then I just had a social emotional learning in service that talked about self -care, teacher care, and student care.

Six of the nine individual interview attendees were intervention specialists and a school psychologist. Five of those school personnel had training in FBA. Only one of the intervention specialists had not conducted or had training in conducting FBA. The intervention specialist stated she will be receiving help from a school psychologist in completing FBA. This intervention specialist is in her first year of employment and explained,

> I really haven't had any training. I hope to go to some professional development days to get some actual training. But in college, I did the dual degree. So, if we're going to be realistic, my degree mainly focused on general education, so I don't have as much experience with the Functional Behavior Assessment.

In contrast,

Participant IS #1 described her FBA focused training,

> They give you examples of you know, Functional Behavior Assessments, that have been done in the past. And then you had to say if it's good or not and then you say why? And then they've given us examples . . . I mean that's basically what it is . . . Like shouldn't you use this one? Is this a good technique and how often do you need to change it? I feel like the kid that we're writing on, I feel . . . we're going to have to change it every week. Just because something works this week but it's not going to work next week.

Participant IS#2 conducts and has also received training in FBA as explained,

> I've had training. It was downtown through the Office of Exceptional Children. They trained the intervention specialists how to fill them out and everything that went along with it. We had the people from OEC came in and taught. I mean we had all the

handouts when we went through different scenarios to try and pinpoint, you know, read about it . . . did an example of one and how to fill out all the forms and I found that helpful to do the example. Like they have a case study they would give to us and we would as a class go over and try and find out what needs to be focused on what might help and . . . by ourselves sometimes . . . sometimes we did that as a class.

Participant IS#4 also had FBA training, specific training focused on certain diagnosis as well as learning on the job.

> At a college level, we had several classes as part of our intervention specialist class, a whole class that was just on basically assessments and Functional Behavior Assessments. And I still have my books from that I like to keep go back to because there are forms and different things in those books that I've got.
>
> And as a district, I'm trying to think if we've ever had just a PD. I had autism training. So, we had a class on autism, well that was part of district PD and it went into a little bit of that. But to have one as a whole. Functional Behavior Assessment probably would be used. Probably will be something they probably do this year.
>
> My training has been in college. My training has been from some of my mentors or maybe the building people who are at definitely from my colleagues. I draw a lot from their experiences in doing functional behavior assessments and then also some PDs, some PDs are specific assessment. But for that population, yes, possible and to see that it's possible, you know, things that go on in a student's world, that you know when students are at school, that doesn't mean that they're not thinking about at home too.

Participant IS#5 had several trainings about FBA and BIP from his district. IS#5 reports,

From the district the latest training I had, not FBA and BIP, but related to how to handle or help kids in ED or emotionally disturb class. And during the training we were trained how to, sort of install systems in the classroom that would help . . . help the kids with their behavior. And one of the things that I implemented is to provide consequences for each violation.

Participant SP#1 conveyed,

other than with the initial training of being a school psychologist . . . school psychology was a split between the clinical psychology program and the experimental program. So, you just understand behavior and my undergraduate major was psychology and then you get the aspect of what's involved in a school environment. So, you get courses from each of those subject areas. So, through the years, last year we had professional development on FBA and BIP. So, basically that's been it that other than just the training that you have and the additional training that you would have for various certification classes through the years,

Participant SP#1: (regarding other FBA training),

we talked about the behavior and brainstorming. I what . . . I remember it was discussing, some of the creative brainstorming. I really can't remember.

and then we discussed different scenarios.

Participant SP#1 continued,

Basically, and I think even though we have acronyms and names to things, I think basically if you understand child development, if you understand human behavior, it's easy to observe the person's behavior, see what might have happened before, what's happening after and start some type of intervention. But sometimes we make things more

complicated because of whatever kind of justification and accountability that we need. But basically, it's . . . things may change, but they basically remained the same.

Focus Groups

Two focus group meetings were held. The group consisted of specific education personnel who would discuss their experiences within schools to answer this study's research question. There were seven semi-structured open-ended questions and one closing question to explore the study participants' perspective on FBA influence on classroom behaviors. See Appendix D for a list of Focus Group questions.

Focus group meetings were held one day apart during the weekday and after the school day for participants. To begin the meetings the researcher asked each participant to describe their job responsibilities and give their position title. There was representation from each of the roles needed to meet the research criteria. The two focus group members were intervention specialists, general educators, and school psychologists. Each of the participants represented a role that would have individual or collaborative responsibility for conducting FBA.

The purpose of this study was to explore how school personnel perceived FBA influence on classroom behaviors. The researcher wanted to first find out what intervention the focus group participants used individually when addressing challenging behaviors. This question provided an opportunity to hear if any focus group participant would refer to FBA directly or any terms or strategies related to the process. IS#2 began the discussion by asking for clarification and then explained,

> Intervention of challenging behaviors? A lot of time we'll take them and counsel with them and try and find out what is causing the behavior, the antecedent, and try to set them up on a behavior plan. We do that sometimes.

Clearly, this participant understood what an FBA is and has participated or engaged in the process. IS #4 added discussing incentives as well as terms related to FBA,

> And you also use positive behavior, both at the classroom level and at the building level. In our room, we have smiley face stickers for whatever you're working on, as far as your behaviors. If it's talking more to your peers, or talking and getting along with your adults, getting your work done. You get four to five smiley faces a day. You get the incentive, which is a movie, short movie and popcorn, or whatever the treat is on Friday. So, I may have gotten that from some other educators along the way, the popcorn and the movie. But you switch it around and figure out what the kids are excited about, so hopefully, you can avoid the antecedents in their behavior, and they can do what they need to do.

The general educator explained that intervention within his classroom included getting support as well as using his own strategies. His comments are like those general educators who participated in the individual interviews. Participant GE#6 expounded,

> Sometimes I'll call the intervention specialist. I have seven in one class, kids that have IEP, and then in another class, I have five. So, she doesn't come into the class, however, I will send them to her if there is a behavior problem. if I can't handle it.
>
> Normally, I have kids grouped and so I'll go, and I'll put my arm around them and say, "Hey, what's going on?" And so other kids, I might yell at them. Or I'll be more aggressive and so I have to be more patient. Plus, when they have given me their IEP and tell me the things that there is, I try to avoid some of the confrontation. There is still some confrontation, they have to learn how to deal with confrontation. So, it's not that I eliminate all of that. I give them some, but then I don't give them all of it.

So, the intervention specialist and I kind of work pretty good, hand in hand … she doesn't come in the room because in high school, I have kids feel they don't want that. They don't want everybody to know they have some issues … they'll say, "Mr._____ I'm not getting this, I need to go down and see . . ." They're acting up in class. And I can tell when they don't understand something. So, instead of them trying, now they're talking and doing some other things. And so, I tell them, "well, why don't you go down and talk to such and such." And then she'll call me and say, "She's not understanding this, you know she needs more extended time. That's why she's acting up." And I say, "okay, that's fine." And so, we have a pretty good working relationship. But I still . . . I come down on them a little bit because they have to learn how to deal with that sometimes.

Participant IS#4 although working in an elementary environment expressed understanding GE#6 perspective. IS#4 stated,

We had that conversation in our classroom today because with my two assistants in the room, one of them may have felt like I was speaking a little harshly. But then I saw that. And so, I explained to the student that there are going to be challenges in life and part of my job is to help you to use self-control and self-motivation and to hold yourself back and find a way to control your behavior. So, whatever that might be. We have yoga in the room. We do different things in the morning with the morning circle, trying to have that stable routine so that you don't fall off track, go over the rules, all of that type of thing. But that's at the elementary level, not at the high school level.

Participant GE#6 was a former middle school teacher, recalled,

I remember one time when I was in [teaching] middle school, there was a kid and he had a behavior . . . anger problem. But he wasn't in my class yet. And he knew I kept candy

in my drawer. And so, he watched me, and my class go down the hall, and he went in my room, took some candy out of my drawer. I went to security and said, “play the tape back, I want to see who did this.” So, I went, and I got him, and it only happened within five minutes. And he thought I was going to jump all over him. But I knew his history and I said, “my man, you don’t have to ever take anything. All you have to do is ask me.” And we built a good relationship after that. And then the following year, he was in my class. And we became real good friends, and he still had that anger problem. But I would just lay it on him. And I said, “tell you what. Just stand out in the hall and just calm down.” And at the end of the year, he had changed. His mom, she couldn’t believe it. I held him to what he should have done.

Participant IS#4 interjected, “You cared.” Participant GE#6 concluded,

> His work became a lot better. And even if he had a problem, it didn’t embarrass . . . he would try. He would read in class out loud. He would be like, “let me read.” He was stumbling over words, but he had gotten better. And he wasn’t worried about the other kids messing with him and all of that. But it was a long process and it wore me out.

Although, participant GE#6 showed that his FBA knowledge was limited, as found in the individual and focus group discussions building relationships with students is important and can support decreasing challenging behaviors. As echoed by participant IS#4 in the following statement, “You can’t do it, an intervention, if the kid is totally resistant to your efforts. You just can’t.”

Recapping the question posed to the first focus group earlier. The school psychologist having a wider view of several buildings was asked, in your experience what behaviors are most prominent or persistent? “ADHD is probably the most common. ADHD is the most common.

Hyperactivity difficulty sitting still, distractibility, impulse control." When asked about the support provided to teachers and other school personnel when those behaviors are seen SP#3 explained,

> I first like to use a behavioral scale to first establish the severity of the behavior. I usually talk to the parent about options in terms of . . . about diagnosis outside of school and possible medication to go along with behavior modification.

Participant SP# 3 also explained,

> Give teachers Behavior Rating Scale. How many times the child gets out of her seat, how many times do they run around the classroom? How many times . . . may they put their hands on another student. And then you look at the severity of it and decide what action you might take, which is to bring the parent in and start talking about options.

Participant SP#2 from the second focus group also spoked to interventions used to address student challenging behaviors,

> The way I look at the behavior is to first look at the adults. And when I'm dealing with students, or when I'm collaborating with teachers, to try to get them to come from a level of mutual respect for the students, so that they know that and caring, as someone had mentioned, and trying to stick with enforceable statements, saying things, and establishing rules that you can actually enforce. Also, giving them choices within . . . and also reinforcing that the adults need to work with the realm of control . . . we can't control what makes the students do. So, work within that realm of control, stay positive, and just really be attune to . . . one's feelings we're dealing with and those behaviors.

Moving forward with the first focus group discussion the researcher was interested to explore the following statement that was posed to the group *When addressing student*

challenging behavior, I understand how to identify the purpose or cause of unwanted behavior by … How do you know? The researcher addressed the school psychologist first who proceeded to give an interesting response, Participant SP#3 contended,

> Yes. I don't know if I buy into that. A lot of behavior's just occurring without cause. I'm not a fan of the functional behavior assessment … identify reasons for behavior . . . minute to minute . . . amount of time we invest in trying to figure that out can probably be better spent. The premise of the functional behavior assessment is that there are . . . for behaviors . . . behaviors but the science doesn't support that . . . behavior can be maintained with or without reinforcement. Behavior can be maintained without triggers. That's why medication and behavior modification is so important. So, I kind of challenge the functional behavior assessment premise.

Participant SP#3 was thanked for his open and honest perspective and expertise on FBA. After the researcher gave a brief background on FBA according to the literature including the pro and cons of the FBA process. Participant SP#3 added,

> We do a lot of them. But they're very rarely successful. There are some . . . many variables involved in behavior, some that occur before they come to school, some that occur on Monday, but not on Tuesday. Some situations . . . you can't control the kids in the classroom sitting around that one student. And again, conditions like hyperactivity, conditions like oppositional defiance . . . some of them have a biological entity to them. It's not all environment. Some . . . high level of impulse and hyperactivity . . . or not, that hyperactivity is there. It's there on Saturday and Sunday, as well as during the school week. And I know they're (FBA) mandated. Actually, I am not a fan. We do them all the

time, but we very rarely see a lot of success as . . . oppose to getting medication taking the right medication, and then again, some behavior has a biological core to it.

This perspective was important because the purpose of this study is to explore how school personnel (school psychologists, intervention specialists, and general educators) perceive the influences of FBA on classroom behavior. To understand this phenomenon, an honest discussion of the participants' experiences and expertise was wanted to answer the research question.

The second focus group school psychologist responded to that sessions' participants by addressing the same question, "*When addressing student challenging behavior; I understand how to identify the purpose or cause of the unwanted behavior by . . . "*posed to the first group. Participant SP#2 expressed,

I would just like to add that a lot of what was just said, I think that there are different triggers, for lack of a better word, on different days. So, it just all depends, depending on how things went at home the night before, or what may have happened on the bus, or in the hallway. I think if you know your students well, you kind of know, sometimes, some of the things that kind of set them off. Again, it can vary, just depending on the situation.

Most of all the participants had mentioned during our discussions their perspectives on triggers to student challenging behaviors. The researcher asked the group to identify what triggers or conditions they have observed that contributed to maintaining student challenging behaviors in the classroom environment. Participant IS#4 started by reflecting back to the discussion presented by the first focus group school psychologist. Participant IS#4 stated,

So, I was thinking as he [SP#3] was speaking, that my room was once one large autism room. It is now half of a room. And so the wall that they put up in between the room to

> divide it is very thin, and since it's two rooms of kids with autism when one is . . . and having different types of behavior, you may hear one of my students in my room start to be triggered by the student that is next door. So not only to do you have different students with autism feeding on different ends of the spectrum, some are high, and some are in the middle. So, you have them start . . . so sometimes you can just tell one student to stop, and that stops everything that is going on.
>
> So yeah, it's very interesting what can trigger different students with different disabilities. And students will figure that out, and they may set somebody . . . on purpose. And that is what is interesting too. You're a little too intelligent. [humorously] You want to push his buttons, in other words, so you push them. Just by making a noise.
>
> Participants IS#2 and IS#4 engaged in a brief concurring back and forth. IS#4 added, They do like to pick at each other. They don't know when to stop, too. Sometimes it will start off as we're just playing around, just kidding, but then some might think they're serious. And pretty . . . soon it just . . . yeah, keeps going on.

Participant IS#4 replied,

> Especially as they get older and they have something to . . . Or as you had said, they don't want people to know that I'm autistic, oppositional defiant . . . a lot of the labels and categories of special education don't really fit them when they're trying to be cool or they're trying to get a girl's attention or a boy's attention.

Participants IS#2 concurred, "And like you'd mentioned, too, that a lot of times, they do it to avoid doing the work. Either they don't want to do it, or they can't." IS#4 stated, "Right. That is a definite trick." Participant Ge# 6 interjected considering something that the researcher had said earlier about topology versus function.

I think one thing that you mentioned, and I never thought about it, two kids doing the same thing, the type of behavior, and then how do you know if a child has a behavior problem or not? And I think that's where it comes into play, where the specialist has to run these tests. You can tell faster than we can. But when you actually do the initial test, then you show the areas that the child has . . . the weaknesses. A lot of times, we don't know until something happens. I know one incident that happened at our school, and we didn't know that this kid had an IEP until something had happened. And then the person that fell down on the job, getting that information to us. Because we would have handled the situation a little differently, we would have been more patient, we would have tried some other strategies and stuff. So, it's imperative that we get the information so we know what to do and so we don't have those other problems even more so. That's a big job, but yet like what you said, it's kind of hard to say okay, they're both doing this, they're both about . . . and this one doesn't have an . . . but this one . . .

Participant GE#6 continued expressing an additional dilemma,

But really, in high school, a lot of times a parent refuses the services. They don't want that. And so now you have a kid that used to be on medication, that used to be in a resource room and all that, now they get to high school and they're not on any of that. But they still have those problems. So, the kids that I currently have, who have IEPs and things, they're probably some of our better students because they kind of stay together when they're in the same class, they sit in same groups . . . and they help each other. And they understand each other, and they socialize with each other.

Next, the focus group engaged in a discussion about the importance of having the input of everyone involved with the child. Although all participants agree that general educators should

give input when addressing student behaviors. Yet, the experiences between these participants varied. It was also expressed that when behavioral decisions were finalized general educators more often are only asked to sign off on the paperwork. IS#4 stated, her experience as,

> And I don't know how it is in high school, not to interrupt you, but it's becoming more and more relevant for there to be a general education teacher, even when you're in a self-contained room during the writing of the IEP, during functional behavior assessment, to get their input.

Participant GE#6 explained that his personal experiences teaching in the middle school were different than experiences teaching in high school. "They don't. There's no input. In middle school, we had input. We would sit around a table and come up with strategies and help write the IEP. But in high school, no."

The researcher proceeded to explore if and how the participants had looked into their own environments for conditions that maintained student challenging behaviors. GE#4 stated,

> Well, in my room, I have groups. I have groups, and so I never assign kids where they need to sit. So, after the first week of school, wherever you decide to sit, that's where you sit. And usually, kids gravitate to the people kind of like them, they get along with. And so, if I ever have to separate them or something, they don't like being away from their group, so they get their behavior in check. So, they go . . . yeah. But I don't know, I try to treat them all the same. Everybody's the same. I might yell at one that needs to be yelled at. I treat them all the same.

Continuing their discussion about conditions within the classroom. IS#4 expressed, "It could have came from home. GE#6 remembered, "That's what this guy said the other day. This

guy said, “I can’t change what’s going on outside of the school. I can’t change any of that.” So now, where do I go from there? When you come into the classroom.”

The school psychologist was asked if there was any comment on the preceding discussion. The following is the insightful reply,

> Just a general statement that changing behavior is extremely difficult. And whether you’re trying to change your spouse’s behavior or change your behavior, we’re trying to do the same thing with kids. We’re trying to get them to act differently and you know how hard it is with adults. Think about children who really don’t understand the world yet and aren’t mature enough to oftentimes be that responsible, it’s very challenging to change behavior . . . in an adult human being especially because . . . with adults, their behavior . . . functional behavior assessment for . . . how difficult it is to identify those triggers for adults. And it’s very complicated to change behavior. It’s not that simple . . . that I think the FBA BIP presents it as just a very simple equation to change behavior. It’s very difficult.

All school personnel whether they participated in an individual interview or as part of one of the focus groups were asked about the implementation of SWPBIS or PBIS. Almost collectively PBIS within their respective buildings or within the classroom focused on incentives. Incentives as an effort to encourage positive behavior including rewards for acts of kindness varied from dances, popcorn, and pizza parties to name a few. Participants were asked about their perspectives on PBIS and parent involvement. It was a unanimous consensus that parent involvement was important. Is#4 explained that some parents are just a phone call away and will impose consequences. That was helpful for her classroom environment to address behavioral issues.

Participant GE# 6 agreed but has experienced concerns or barriers to collaborating with parents. Participant GE#6 explained his perspective,

> I agree with what you say tremendously. We have . . . and I think this is second year, where I currently teach, and we don't have that. Because whenever you click on a child's name, it's saying custody issues. And so, a lot of kids are not living at home or now there's some living at a homeless shelter and they have to be out at a certain time. And I mean, it's all these . . . who can I turn to? And a lot of the phone numbers are disconnected and so . . . yeah, we're on our own. But it would be nice if we did have the parent participation. Every now and then, you'll get a parent, and they're right in there. But . . . IS#2 interjected, I think it's essential. GE#6 added, "Yeah, it has to be . . . " IS#2 agreed, "It is."

Schools across the country are implementing school-wide positive behavior systems, which include a three-tiered intervention. Conducting FBA for student challenging behaviors is found in the third tier. Ryoo, Hong, Bart, Shin, and Bradshaw (2018) contended that SWPBIS may not be as effective without "positive changes in behavior competence" (p. 641). Ryoo et al. (2018) study conducted in a Minnesota school system that focused on a standardized state-wide test to determine the effectiveness of SWPBIS on academic and behavioral outcomes had its limitation.

PBIS was also discussed by this study's participants. Most of the study individual interviewees and focus group participants connected incentives with PBIS. As these school personnel implement SWPBIS to address the academic and behavioral challenges within classrooms, further FBA training may be needed to support their efforts.

Chapter 4 Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore how school personnel (school psychologists, intervention specialists, and general educators) perceive the influence of FBA on classroom behaviors. This chapter presents the findings from three data sources, a Qualtrics demographic questionnaire, individual interviews, and focus groups. Twenty school personnel met the study criteria and completed a Qualtrics demographic questionnaire. Nine participants completed an individual interview. There were two focus group with five to six participants in the first meeting and six participants in the second attending each session.

School personnel (school psychologists, intervention specialists, and general educators) discussed their perception and experience working with students in an urban environment. Their perceptions revealed the interventions and strategies used when addressing challenging student behaviors. Participants' perceptions revealed findings and results that emerged from data analysis.

The findings resulted in four theoretical constructs and ten supporting themes. A combination of manual, Open and In Vivo coding was used to analyze the interview and focus group data. These procedures were used to capture the phenomenon in the voice of the participants. There were distinct differences in the perspective between school psychologists, intervention specialists, and general educators. School psychologists and intervention specialists were more likely to conduct or facilitate the FBA process. General educators associated checklist and observations to intervention procedures but not directly connected to the term FBA. Yet, all participant general educators at some point in their current or past tenure had supported a student with an identified special need displaying challenging behaviors in the classroom.

Chapter 5 will present further evaluation and interpretation of the research results. An application of the literature connects to the study findings and results. Recommendation for further research in the use of FBA is presented. Lastly, a concluding discussion of the data collected is given. Miles et al. (2019) explained, “People are meaning finders and meaning makers; we keep the world consistent and predictable by organizing and interpreting it as best we can” (p. 333). Most important about the preceding statement is the authors’ further caution to question whether the meanings discuss are trustworthy. Tactics for generating meaning advised by Miles et al. (2019) and used in this study are discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

The U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Services and Rehabilitation (2016), prepared a *Dear Colleague Letter*. The letter addressed the expectation that school personnel provide students with special needs a FAPE. A significant requirement within the legal obligation of a FAPE as discussed in the *Letter* is the need to create positive behavioral supports for students with special needs displaying challenging behaviors. If students are experiencing repeated disciplinary actions. OSER guidance contended that students may not be receiving the appropriate behavioral interventions and supports.

The purpose of this study was to explore school personnel perspectives on the influence of FBA on classroom behaviors. The insights provided by the study participants support the purpose of this study. The data sources, questionnaire, individual interviews, and focus groups were effective means to understanding the experiences of school personnel as they have addressed student behavior proactively and when needed a more strategic intervention to student challenging behavior. Although the purpose and goal of this study were to answer the research question. The results also revealed that study participants were able to reflect on their experiences and assess their practices. The study participants discussed their experiences in an honest and open manner.

Specific school personnel were recruited to participate in this study. Study participants were school psychologists, intervention specialists and general educators who had individual or collaborative responsibilities to conduct FBA. The study participants were identified through snowball sampling. Initial contact was made to potential study participants. From the initial

study participant group, additional school personnel were identified to come forward. All the potential participants that were identified through snowball sampling met the study criteria.

Study participants completed a demographic questionnaire that also included an exploratory question about student behavior as a brief overview of their experience. Only one participant responded no to the following question, *"Have you encountered student challenging behavior(s) that did not respond to your classroom management strategies or interventions?"* The remaining participants 19 out of 20 responded yes. The one respondent was in her first few months of the school year and first year of teaching. From the snowball sampling of specific school personnel, nine individual interviews and two focus group meetings were completed. An analysis of the data collected resulted in four theoretical constructs and 10 supporting themes. The coding procedures and analysis of the individual interviews and focus groups help answer the research question: How do school personnel (school psychologists, intervention specialists, and general educators) perceive the influence of FBA on classroom behaviors?

The study findings supported the research question. The results added to the body of literature that focused on FBA research in schools. The study is important because it provided, through the perceptions and experiences of specific school personnel, the implementation and barriers to the use of FBA in an urban educational environment. The findings indicated that future research should explore how PBIS is understood by school personnel and the implementation of FBA mandates toward best practices. In this concluding chapter, the researcher will discuss further recommendations for behavioral research, limitations of the study and implication of the results.

Summary of the Results

This qualitative case study explored how school personnel (school psychologists, intervention specialists, and general educators) perceived the influence of FBA on classroom behaviors. Specific school personnel were recruited because of their individual or collaborative responsibility for conducting FBA. Using a snowball sampling technique 20 school personnel from a local urban school district participated in this study. The study participants represented elementary, middle and high school personnel that fulfilled the specific criteria to answer the research question.

Data from the Qualtrics questionnaires, individual interviews, and focus groups were used in this study to explore the research question. Snowball sampling resulted in 20 school personnel completing the online Qualtrics demographic questionnaire. The participants responding to the demographic questionnaire consist of nine general educators, eight intervention specialists and three school psychologists. The responses from the demographic questionnaire included an inquiry about participants' experience with challenging behaviors. The questionnaire responses provided a brief overview of participant academic and employment background information. The additional behavior question was exploratory and provided a foundation to further understand their experiences within the educational environment. Nine individual interviews were conducted at local libraries and businesses. Two focus group meetings took place at a local historical women's club. The focus groups consisted of five participants in the first meeting and six in the second session lasting 60 to 70 minutes, respectively.

The three data sources (questionnaires, individual interviews, and focus groups) were essential to answer the research question. The initial process of analyzing the data sources began with Janesick's (2015) advice to return to the purpose, the guiding questions, guiding theoretical

framework and chosen research method. Transcripts were uploaded to Atlas.ti for data organization and coding procedures. Saldaña (2016) described a coding cycle with two groups of methods. Two coding procedures selected from Saldaña's (2016) cycle groups for this study are listed under the elemental and affective methods. Although, open and in vivo was (primarily use some values codes identified) used as coding methods: The initial coding step for this study included manual and the use of a frequency table (Miles et al., 2019). Using these procedures helped gain a deeper understanding of participants' experiences. The data analysis process helped identify emerging theoretical constructs and supporting themes from the exploration of participants' perspectives of FBA.

FBA has its foundation in Skinner's work on functional relationships between behavior and environment supported the conceptual framework of applied behavioral analysis field. Therefore, influencing the practice of functional analysis and application of FBA as a process toward effective BIP and part of PBIS within learning environments. Behaviorism as a theoretic framework for FBA considers what is directly happening in the environment from an antecedent or external stimulus-response perspective. The findings revealed that general educators would benefit from FBA training that increased their ability to identify the function of student challenging behavior as an initial intervention to address challenging behavior. For, educators to comply with IDEA mandates and district directives regarding FBA, school personnel will need the skills to implement the process with fidelity. In addition, there was a gap between the behavioral process and general educators' knowledge of the overall procedures. Some educators revealed that they were only knowledgeable of their part in the collaborative process to address student behavior.

The findings relative to intervention specialists revealed that their experiences varied according to their assigned workplace. For example, responses from some intervention specialists revealed in their school building co-workers (paraprofessionals) in self-contained classes may consist of one to several persons supporting the students in the classroom. It should be noted that the number of co-workers assisting intervention specialists in the self-contained class may vary because some students' IEPs indicated one-on-one accommodations; others may not. The challenged revealed for intervention specialists who do not have needed or required supportive assistance within the classroom. These school personnel had students with identified diagnoses for example, emotionally disturbed or autistic.

Lastly, as students are moved into inclusive classrooms some general educators revealed not having the skills to support students with an identified diagnosis within the general education classroom without the intervention specialists. Most of the general educators did not want to be excluded from addressing behavior problems within their classrooms. Yet, findings revealed that most educators welcomed and saw specialized school personnel as more skilled to address challenging behaviors. School psychologists were most often referred to as an in-house skilled and supportive person to help address student challenging behaviors. Intervention specialists were also seen as supportive persons to address student behaviors. Intervention specialists also identified themselves as the identified person to complete FBA. In addition, study participants identified specific persons assigned by the district to support teachers and students focusing on trauma care and creating positive school climates.

The following sections of this chapter include a brief closing discussion of the four theoretical constructs and 10 supporting themes that emerged from the perspectives of school personnel. The theoretical constructs and supporting themes revealed commonalities and

differences in the lens in which specific school personnel experience addressing student behavior(s). The responses support the study findings regarding FBA implementation, barriers, and best practices. Overall, recommendations and implications are also provided in this chapter.

Discussion of the Results

In this study, the researcher explored the experiences of specific school personnel to understand the influence of FBA on classroom behavior through their lens. The results showed that general educators were not familiar with the term FBA. Yet, general educators' responses indicated that they had collaborated in some aspect of the behavioral intervention process. In general, intervention specialists who were knowledgeable of an FBA described the process as beneficial. School psychologists and intervention specialists were more likely to have participated in the FBA process as the primary person, a facilitator or as part of a collaborative team. School psychologists were reported to conduct a lot of FBA. In contrast, one psychologist believed there were alternative means for decreasing student challenging behavior. The school psychologist contended that a lot of behaviors occur without a cause. In the school psychologist's perspective time is wasted trying to identify the cause of the behavior. Furthermore, according to the school psychologist, behavior can be maintained with or without reinforcement or triggers. The school psychologist's experience suggests that medication and behavior modification would be more effective for addressing student challenging behaviors.

In general, study participants agreed that the FBA process is time-consuming. Researchers have found conducting a quality FBA leading to an effective BIP can be a lengthy process that becomes a barrier to implementation and best practices (Dunlap & Kern, 2018; O'Neill et al., 2015; Scott & Burt, 2018; Strickland-Cohen et al., 2016). The body of literature that focused on school-based FBA found that educators can implement effective FBA with

training. Furthermore, researchers have studied barriers to FBA implementation and developed truncated procedures to help educators address challenging behaviors.

The results of this study show that the application of FBA by school personnel can vary. General educators are expected to support all students within the classroom including a growing placement of students with diagnosed disabilities. Yet, general educators including those with exemplary classroom management skills are lacking the knowledge to address challenging student behaviors. More often described as a challenge for general educators, participants were addressing the behaviors of at-risk and students moved from a self-contained environment to an inclusive population. Difficulties for general educators were the placement of students into the inclusive classroom without intervention specialist support. Concerning are the situations where intervention specialists are unavailable to support the inclusive classroom because of teaching in their own self -contained classroom.

If educators in the general classroom are to implement functional assessments. Time restraints and other responsibilities make it difficult to complete direct observations with fidelity. It is unreasonable to expect school personnel to conduct detailed observations during instructional time. Dunlap and Kern (2018) explained the need for comprehensive functional assessments would be decreased if a continuum of functional behavior support was in place. The continuum of functional support would begin in preservice programs and in-service professional development that would train teachers to think functionally. Thinking functionally would enhance school personnel skills to focus on the cause or purpose of challenging student behavior in order to decrease or extinguish. All general educators and one intervention specialist participant were not knowledgeable of the FBA process. The intervention specialist was aware of FBA but did not have any experience in the process. Considering closely the study purpose and

research question the researcher explored how specific school personnel perceived the influence of FBA on classroom behaviors.

FBA considers typology vs. function of behavior. Student behavior can be simple, complex and varied. The interviews and focus group discussions revealed that study participants perceived student behaviors that disrupt learning from a different lens. Prevalent behaviors described by study participants included off task, inattention, socializing and lack of motivation. In addition, prevalent behaviors included getting out of one's seat without permission, touching others, and screaming. Study participants depending on their role teach and support a student population whose social and economic demographics are across the range of family statistics. School personnel described several causes for student behaviors more often family dysfunction was related to barriers to learning.

FBA is viewed as interventions and support. FBA means checklist and observations. General educators when describing behavior interventions list checklist and observation as their role in the collaborative process. Although, general educators were not aware of the term FBA. General educators completed forms and observation as directed by school personnel directing the interventions for problem behaviors or facilitating the FBA process. School psychologists used terms as behavioral scales when describing the forms educators complete during the FBA process. In general, during an intervention study, participants may keep a record or tally of student behaviors observed for an allotted timeframe. All study participants believe that collaboration is important to address student unwanted behavior that impedes learning.

FBA means IAT support. All study participants referred to the IAT as the first step to receive support when the classroom behavioral interventions are not working. The IAT is an identified group of school personnel and may include outside resource persons. The IAT includes

school personnel including principals, teachers, specialists, and school psychologists. These team members work collaboratively to address academic and behavioral concerns to help students achieve better outcomes. Study participants believed that the IAT was beneficial and supportive. Yet, most general educators found that interventions that are directed by the team for implementation in the classroom on behave of a student may take months to years to complete acceptable progress or appropriate placement. Study participants also discussed the IEP team specifically supporting their students with special needs. Intervention specialists and school psychologists were more familiar with IEP and the development and maintenance of student records. It was unclear if general educators received needed information to comply with directives in the IEP to support student progress. One general educator recalled an incident regarding a student and, if the information was known, the outcome for the student may have been different.

Specialized district personnel guide FBA. The responses of study participants indicated that specialized district personnel usually conduct or facilitate the FBA process. The body of literature also showed that school psychologists and behavior analysts more often conduct FBA (Steege, Pratt, Wickerd, Guare, & Watson, 2019). Intervention specialists who participated in the study reported conducting FBA for their own students and supporting general educators. Participants described in the inclusive class when needed.

FBA is PBIS. PBIS is incentives. When study participants were asked how their school implemented positive behavior intervention and support the responses list incentives and rewards. Although specialized school personnel were knowledgeable of components of PBIS they also list incentives and rewards. Intervention specialists and general educators described school-wide PBS as field trips, special activities, points and treats as some of the incentives for

positive actions. Several educators described incentives specifically for their students to promote positive work habits and behavior. CHAMPS was referred to ask a component of PBIS. CHAMPS is a proactive strategy for classroom management that supports behavior expectations throughout the student's day.

PBIS is building relationships. Individual interviews and focus group participant agreed that positive relationships with students and parents were important. Building and maintaining a positive relationship with students was described as essential. Participants related different stories where having a good relationship with a student help deescalate a situation. Several participants recalled how a positive relationship motivated a student toward academic achievement and decreased or eliminated negative behaviors within the classroom. Overall, school psychologists, intervention specialists, and general educators described PBIS implementation as the use of incentives and rewards to maintain or encourage positive behavior.

FBA is a skill. FBA occurs where there is knowledge and training. IDEA mandates conducting an FBA and developing a BIP to address challenging behaviors of students identified with a disability. IDEA and research on behavior found that FBA leading to an effective function-based BIP will also support at risk in the general education environment. General educators and intervention specialists (assigned to self-contained environments) are directly responsible for students in their classrooms. However, the study findings showed that general educators and beginning intervention specialists are not skilled in identifying the cause or purpose of behavior. A significant body of literature promotes FBA when conducted with fidelity as best practices and an effective process to decrease or extinguish negative behaviors within the classroom. Several participants had some form of FBA training and others were willing to attend professional development provided by their district. More often, FBA training is an option for

general school personnel. The results found that FBA training is either required or chosen by more specialized and supportive personnel. General educators reported having trauma care and social-emotional learning training provided by their district. Currently, the findings indicated that general educators are not isolated from the process but believe trained persons should help address a student challenging behavior in the classroom.

Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature

FBA, when conducted with fidelity, has been found to support school personnel in decreasing and in many cases extinguishing challenging behaviors. Trump et al. (2018) explained, "An FBA involves data collection methods aimed at evaluating environmental variables and their relation to the target behavior" (p. 388). Researchers and practitioners within the body of educational and social science literature have studied the benefits and impediments to conducting FBA. FBA has its foundation in applied behavioral analysis and concepts as far back as Skinner's observations that there are functional causes and relationships of behavior.

A plethora of research literature supports the use of FBA in classrooms. More school personnel nationally are implementing district-wide strategies connecting FBA and PBIS as a systemic intervention (Crone et al., 2015; Knoster & Drogan, 2016; McCurdy et al., 2016). The research also showed that general educators can identify the cause or function of a student's challenging behavior with FBA knowledge and training (Young et al., 2018). Often, general educators are supported by specialized school personnel when addressing students' challenging behaviors. Educators who have an understanding and practice in identifying the cause and purpose of student challenging behavior can positively change their own classroom environment (Borgmeier et al., 2015).

Beyond IDEA mandates and directives, FBA conducted with the goal of developing an effective function-based BIP is widely studied and found to be best practice. School leaders and state departments of education are working toward building capacity in schools for educators and support persons to meet the academic, behavioral and social-emotional needs of students. Although, general educator participants were not knowledgeable about the FBA process. Study participants referred to CHAMPS as a strategy for addressing academic deficiencies and student behavior. In general, study participants identified CHAMPS as a district directive and part of PBIS. The strategies within CHAMPS include specific procedures that are intertwined into lesson plans and instruction to increase academic achievement and classroom management.

Study participants like many school personnel across the United States are complying with district directives to increase student learning and maintain a safe environment. Although, general educators who participated in this study do not have the knowledge to conduct an FBA. Federal mandates require that school personnel support students with a disability displaying challenging behaviors. These mandates are to be applied in certain situations with appropriate interventions including conducting an FBA. General educator study participants more often while still wanting to be a part of the process identified school psychologist, intervention specialist, and other district personnel as more skilled at addressing challenging student behaviors. Johnson, Goldberg, Hinant, and Couch (2019) explained that school psychologists conduct a lot of FBA. Yet, school psychologists used known specific practices. In addition, Johnson et al. (2019), when discussing trends, found that the procedures used by school psychologists vary as well as forms used during the process.

Lastly, it is important that school districts comply with IDEA mandates. Collins and Zirkel (2017) found that it is critical for school personnel to understand the legal requirements

and professional requirements of FBA and BIP and particularly for a student with or at risk for emotional disturbances. The findings in this study revealed the difficulties and barriers to completing an FBA with fidelity. A deeper understanding emerged as participants discussed their perspectives and experiences. The need for FBA training and understanding building a capacity to hypothesize the cause or purpose of student behavior. Even if the cause or purpose of a student challenging behavior is incorrect. Knowledge is an initial skill that may increase an educator's confidence in addressing inappropriate behavior. Behavior that is learned can be unlearned, educators need knowledge and skill to build confidence to take the initial steps to address behaviors that interfere with learning in their own classroom. Steege et al. (2019) explained, "To understand the FBA process, it is important to keep in mind the behavior-analytic foundations from which it was derived" (p. 28).

Limitations

Selecting specific school personnel who had primary or collaborative responsibility for conducting FBA yield valuable insight to answering the research question. This study has potential limitations because it focused on a snowball sampling of school personnel from an urban school district in a midsize city in Ohio. The snowball sample of participants met the criteria to be included in the study. A snowball technique was used and did not cause a sampling error because the participants are representative of school personnel in other districts across the country.

Yet, as data collection was compiled several participants referred to new school personnel roles that also support teachers and students regarding behavior, school climate, and social-emotional concerns. These individuals may have collaborative roles in the behavioral

intervention process. Future exploration or replication of this study should include the experiences of these new school personnel roles.

Sampling limitations. The recognition that educators are teaching students at risk or identified with a disability within the general education classroom has caused federal education departments and school districts to administer supports. A significant body of research found that educators would benefit from training (Strickland-Cohen et al., 2016). Although, general educators and some intervention specialists study participants had not attended FBA training. Overall, with the exception of school psychologists' clinical background, classroom management or behavioral training was not a part of participants' professional or college courses. However, some participants referred to trauma and social-emotional learning professional development opportunities and directives. It was apparent during the discussions that district and community persons were providing instructional and classroom management support. Two specific support personnel roles were identified during individual and focus group meetings. This study was limited to the participants that resulted from the researcher's snowball sampling recruitment criteria. The perspectives of positive school climate coaches and social-emotional learning consultants would add to the rich data and may have further expanded the research question.

Methods limitations. This qualitative case study explored school personnel (school psychologists, intervention specialists, and general educators) perspective of FBA influence on classroom behaviors. The snowball sampling of 20 specific school personnel completed a researcher-developed Qualtrics demographic questionnaire. There were also individual interviews and two focus group meetings. The data that emerged from these resources was rich and supported the purpose of the study. Selecting a qualitative case study method help to deepen the understanding of this phenomenon.

In addition, a comprehensive exploration of this phenomenon considered reviewing the local district discipline data. Lewis et al. (2017) explained, "Archival data, such as attendance or behavioral infractions, can be useful in identifying possible setting event patterns (p. 233). This study was limited because archival records (discipline data) were not accessible. Archival records of student discipline data (referrals, suspensions, and expulsions) were to be reviewed for the last 4 years. If the discipline data were accessible it would be reviewed to compare with study participants' responses to reveal if any alignments. Specifically, the archival record of discipline data may or may not have agreed with the perception of how school personnel (school psychologists, intervention and specialists and general educators) perceive the influence of FBA on classroom behaviors.

Implication of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory

The purpose of this study was to explore how school personnel (school psychologists, intervention specialists, and general educators) perceive the influence of FBA on classroom behaviors. Specific school personnel discussed their experiences addressing student behavior issues. Study participants were able to dialogue about their knowledge or lack of knowledge regarding FBA and BIP. SWPBIS was also explored and found to be a significant part of their work to meet student social and emotional needs, increase learning and decrease behavior challenges.

Focus group meetings provided a safe environment to discuss with colleagues in similar and different roles sensitive issues regarding practices and policies that influence their work. Comments during group dialogue spoke to its potential value as participants shared struggles, experiences, and expertise to support each other. Collectively, the group members expressed thanks for the platform not to negatively ventilate but to professionally assess the current

condition of their work environments, personal practices, and district expectations and directives. This exploration allowed school personnel to reflect on their practices within the educational environment and provided rich data to support the findings and results of this study. These findings have implications for the greater body of school personnel and district leadership working toward student academic achievement and creating positive school climates.

Implication for practice. As more students are moved from self-contained to inclusive classroom environments general educators will need the capacity to meet all students' needs. Study participants discussed the complications that arise from the placement of students with special needs into an inclusive environment without specialist support. Most challenging for educators within the classroom is supporting the needs of students with emotional and behavioral disorders (Scott & Burt, 2018).

Additionally, what was made very clear by participants is the need for every general education classroom to have a teacher and coworker (i.e., paraprofessional) to support students. General educators are not alone addressing academic needs and challenging behaviors in their classrooms. Special educators (intervention specialists) also struggle with behavior challenges teaching a student population with diverse special needs. New to their career intervention specialists (formerly known as special educators) were found to leave their positions at a greater rate compared to general educators (Sweigart & Collins, 2017). In general, most intervention specialists that participated in this study had or were entitled to regular co-worker(s) support in their self-contained classroom.

The results of this study build on previous research. Educators will need the training to apply best practices (Young et al., 2018). Young and Martinez (2016) found that educators, in general, or special roles who are knowledgeable of and apply ABA principles are better equipped

to address challenging student behaviors. These authors also found that teachers with ABA knowledge will use FBA techniques as an initial intervention when addressing student challenging behaviors. During the individual interviews and focus group meetings school personnel that lack FBA knowledge expressed willingness to attend professional development in this area. Although, abundant research exists that supports the ability of general educators to conduct FBA. The classroom responsibilities of general educators to conduct an FBA is seen as a barrier to effective implementation (Young et al., 2018).

An outcome of this qualitative study reveals that general educators are participating in collaborative behavior intervention without understanding why and the what of FBA. The same for their understanding of PBIS, which is seen as a series of activities, incentives, and rewards. For some school personnel, there is not an understanding of the connection between PBIS, FBA, and BIP. In general, checklist or behavior scales and observations while valuable, do not provide the general educator the tools to make an initial intervention to address challenging behaviors on their own.

In this study, the researcher discussed the expert findings that suggest general educators can think functionally with training and use their investigation to identify the cause or purpose of student behavior (Borgmeier et al., 2015; McCahill et al., 2014; Moreno et al., 2017; Oakes et al., 2018; Strickland-Cohen et al., 2016). When asked during an individual interview with an intervention specialist who taught in a self-contained classroom how confident he was with identifying the cause or purpose of student behavior, he responded that he felt pretty confident, about 95%. This participant also stated, “If you are with the kid every day, you know the function of their behavior.”

Beyond, the purpose of this study was to explore how school personnel (school psychologists, intervention specialists, and general educators) perceived the influence of FBA on classroom behaviors. Within, this exploration it was clear with or without behavioral intervention skills school personnel believed that building relationships were essential to address student challenging behaviors. It was apparent for some participants building positive relationships with students was an effective intervention. The focus group participants were asked *what interventions do you use when addressing student challenging behavior?* Overwhelmingly, building relationships with students was as important as proactive and preventive strategies. The participants spoke genuinely and shared stories about struggles with students that eventually lead to cooperation, because of a positive caring relationship.

Walker and Barry (2017) explained that sometimes in collaborative roles (special educators and general educators) in the classroom, failed outcomes from a BIP is the results of a general educator's unfamiliarity with a behavior plan. Lastly, if school personnel are to comply with IDEA mandates regarding FBA a clear understanding of the legal directives is needed. It is imperative that school personnel not only consider professional recommendations but also the legal requirements (Zirkel, 2017).

Analysis of the demographic questionnaire data revealed that two of the eight intervention specialist respondents teach in an inclusive environment. Co-teaching in the inclusive classroom more often has a general educator and intervention specialist supporting assigned students identified with a disability. This does not mean that intervention specialists and general educators do not support all students in the classroom when needed. However, some study participants believed that in certain situations the intervention specialist was trained to meet the needs of students with students identified with a disability or on an IEP. One of the

intervention specialists reported co-teaching within the classroom and when needed pulling students out for individual or small group support. Occasionally intervention specialists or general educators may feel that a student may need individual support outside the inclusive environment. The intervention specialist may pull out an individual student or small group to a resource room. This is another form of inclusive collaboration.

Scruggs and Mastropieri (2017) discussed co-teaching and focused on new special educators like one of the participants in this study. Recall, that in this study intervention specialists were formerly known as special educators in their district. Another intervention specialist teaching in a self-contained classroom was new to her career and not skilled in conducting FBA. It may benefit new intervention specialists to have co-teaching opportunities in inclusive classrooms with seasoned educators where shared expertise and collaboration can take place.

Scruggs and Mastropieri (2017) research on co-teaching suggested that in collaborative inclusive classrooms "Although there are many co-teaching skills and practices to learn, new special education teachers may benefit most from focusing on (a) engaging in effective collaboration with their co-teachers and (b) providing explicit instruction to students with disabilities" (2017). In addition, the researchers described the optimal roles for this collaborative pair to meet the needs of students with diverse disabilities. Although it will take a high level of skills; general educators would have responsibility for content and curriculum and intervention specialists or special educators would "mostly responsible for evaluating problems in classroom learning and social behavior and providing strategies and interventions for addressing these problems" (p. 285).

Implication for policy. In the past, FBA was used primarily in clinical settings by specialized and trained professionals (Anderson et al., 2015; McCahill et al., 2014). The federal directives of IDEA (2004) increased the use of FBA in schools. Theoretical constructs and supporting themes that emerged from exploring the research question revealed considerations that are made in the proceeding discussion of implications for policy. Policies in the last decades on a safe school environment focused on strengthening reactionary discipline actions such as zero tolerance, suspensions and expulsions (Skiba & Losen, 2016). These negative consequences are not effective over time especially for certain demographic populations, for example, students who are from disadvantaged backgrounds. Currently, the trend is for more evidence-based and effective behavioral approaches to be used in schools.

It was apparent that individual interviewees and focus group participants were committed to complying with district policies and initiatives. During the individual interviews and focus group meetings, similar perspectives emerged involving the practices expected from district policies or procedures and the reality to implement them with fidelity. Although, school personnel expressed appreciation and understanding for initiatives to address student learning and school improvement. Some respondents were concerned with the increasing number of district supportive persons that were giving directives. Although, support was expressed as possibly needed and wanted some participants found this to be intrusive and evaluative.

Overall, study participants were able to address a question about PBIS implementation. Most responses to PBIS implementation identified school activities in the form of incentives and rewards. CHAMPS was also often connected to PBIS. Skiba and Losen (2016) concurred with the use of PBIS to create positive school climates and "to reduce discipline disparities based on race" (p. 5). The results of this study revealed that, when planning professional development,

school personnel would benefit to understand the implications of PBIS. Specifically, that PBIS is an effective strategy that their district leadership is using as a systemic intervention for change. Skiba and Losen (2016) explained that school climate and school discipline strategies involve relationship building, social-emotional learning and structural interventions like PBIS. In the end, state and federal policies with educators are understanding that suspensions and expulsions are ineffective for transformative change. Ryoo et al. concluded,

> Public schools, educators, and policymakers should support the incorporation of data-driven practices into SWPBIS. Research on the academic effects of such integrated models would help us to better understand the interaction between academic and behavioral excellence in student learning. SWPBIS may engender greater educational benefits in schools if it is integrated with other approaches intended to promote student learning. (p. 641)

Implication for theory. FBA has its foundation in applied behavior analysis. Fryling (2013) explained, "Not only do behavior analysts ask, "What behavior is the problem?" but also "How is the problem behavior functionally related to the environment?" Behavior analysts and other specially trained professionals like school psychologists assess human behavior to support change. Theorists Skinner and Watson contended that behavior that is learned can be unlearned. Based on the findings of these theorists and current scholars, educators with FBA knowledge thinking functionally can support students and bring positive changes.

The results of this study show that school personnel are working collaboratively with support persons facilitating behavioral interventions. Yet, the findings show that educators are more often only responsible for what they described as checklists and observations. School psychologists used terms such as behavioral scales. Nonetheless, general educators and some

new intervention specialists lack an understanding of the complete intervention process. In general, after doing their collaborative part, some respondents did not know the derivation of the intervention that they will be implementing within the classroom.

In contrast, most general educators not wanted to be isolated from the process preferred a skilled or trained support person addressed challenging student behaviors. Although, FBA is well researched, IDEA mandated and found to produce positive behavioral results. The perception of a participant school psychologist based on their expertise and experience described FBA as rarely successful. The school psychologist suggested that behavior modification and possible medication produces better results for students. At this time, FBA is a federal mandate and school personnel are directed to implement the process.

Recommendation for Further Research

Recommendations are based on the findings of this exploratory case study. The responses of the participants revealed a consideration of the following recommendation for best practices and implementation of IDEA mandates to support students with an identified disability, at risk and the general education population.

1. Training general educators may increase implementing FBA with fidelity (including functioned based BIP).
2. Connect the gap between specific staff and general educator's understanding of the FBA (behavioral interventions) process (Educators may benefit from understanding what happens after they complete their part (checklist and observation). Build the capacity of general educators to do preliminary work assessing the function of student challenging behaviors.
3. Training in ABA (connect to IDEA mandates to comply with FBA/BIP).

4. Evaluate the ODE requirement of PBIS in school districts.
5. Explore the roles and perspectives of PSC and Social-Emotional Learning personnel.
6. Further research on the implementation of CHAMP influence on student academics and behaviors.
7. Engage State Support Team to explore a broader perspective state-wide or local districts' comparative implementation of IDEA mandates as it relates to FBA and BIP.

The preceding recommendations for future research include the need for additional supportive persons within the general education. A concern that was addressed during the interviews and focus group meetings was the need for an additional coworker (paraprofessional) within the general education classroom. Responses indicated that school personnel believed that having a co-worker (paraprofessional) within the classroom would not only enhance the academic success of students but also the implementation of behavior interventions and support social-emotional concerns.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how school personnel perceived the influence of FBA on classroom behaviors. Yin (2018) described the characteristics of an exemplary case study that would provide a lasting research contribution. The researcher met the general case study procedures. Nonetheless, the objective was to further provide a lasting research contribution that would be helpful to the study participants, the local school district and potentially expand the literature generalizable to the greater educational community.

Two characteristics define an exemplary case study (Yin, 2018). The researcher selected an issue although well known (FBA) within academic literature was found to be an unusual topic for general educators. Addressing challenging behaviors in schools is of public interest. The

second characteristic of an exemplary case study was addressing an issue that is of national importance. IDEA is a federal mandate that requires that an FBA be conducted in certain situations when a student with an identified disability display challenging behaviors. The national directives indicate that IDEA has theoretical, policy and practical implications. Thus, the study purpose was able to move toward meeting the conditions described by Yin (2018) as a valuable research contribution.

The study findings and results provided insights into the perspectives of specific school personnel (school psychologists, intervention specialist, and general educators) regarding the influence of FBA on classroom behaviors. The findings show that general educators are collaborating in some aspect of the FBA process. Yet, general educators are not familiar with the term FBA nor the overall process. General educators would benefit from an understanding of the entire FBA process beyond what their role which was described as completing checklists and doing observations. It will benefit general educators who have frontline responsibility for students in the classroom to understand the purpose or cause of challenging behaviors of any student regardless of being identified or at risk. In addition, the participant responses also indicated that school psychologists and intervention specialists were more likely to be knowledgeable of FBA. Nevertheless, the results indicate that school personnel would benefit from specific training focusing on FBA. General educators who have knowledge of the FBA process and enhance their skill in identifying the cause of behavior can engage in an initial intervention prior to taking a student to the IAT or IEP team.

In contrast, some participant responses suggest that FBA was found to be less effective and behaviors happen without a cause or purpose. Behavior modification and medication in one psychologist's perspective was found to be more beneficial in addressing behaviors. Another

school psychologist while understanding the concerns of school personnel suggest that educators should look within their own classroom practice to deter challenging behaviors. All participants responded that the process is time consuming. The perspective of these participants concurred with the body of literature that found that implementation of FBA with fidelity can be hindered by the lengthy process. Specific to this study's participant responses was the need for more support (co-worker) within the classroom. Most concerning is the situations where previous self-contained students are moved to the inclusive classroom without specialist support. Some intervention specialists are unable to support the general educator with special needs students because they are also assigned to their own self-contained classroom. Although, the participant responses regarding this concern seem to differ according to the workplace or school building. In the end, data collected indicated that the local district in which the study participants' work is implementing new roles and systemic PBIS resources to meet the academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs of students and school personnel.

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Appendix A: FBA School Personnel Questionnaire (Qualtrics Platform)

1. What position do you hold in the district?

    General Education Teacher

    Intervention Specialist (Inclusive Classroom)

    Intervention Specialist (Non-Inclusive Classroom)

    School Psychologist

2. How many years in current position?

    1 or less-5 years

    6−10 years

    11−20 years

    21−30 years

    31−over

3. How many years with the District?

    1 or less-5 years

    6-10 years

    11-20 years

    21-30 years

    31-over

4. Select the highest education level completed.

    Bachelor’s degree

    Master’s degree

    Educational Specialist (Ed.S)

    Doctorate degree

Other

5. Have you encountered student challenging behavior(s) that did not respond to classroom management strategies or interventions?

Yes

No

Appendix B: Perspectives on FBA School Personnel's Interview Questions (School Psychologists)

1. What student behavior problem(s) have you found to be most prevalent throughout the district?
2. How would you describe Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBA)?
3. What has been your role when an FBA is needed?
4. How confident are you with identifying the purpose or function of student challenging behaviors?
5. How has the District implemented PBIS? **(School Psychologists)**
6. Describe the type of training you had in FBA/BIP?
7. Describe the type of training you had in classroom management?
    a. Share your perspective about the following statement:
8. When it comes to student challenging behavior issues in the classroom I would rather a district support person (school psych/specialists) apply interventions.
9. Are there any other comments you would like to make?

Probing Questions

 # 4 above: Could you share an example of your experience implementing FBA? Or as a team member.

Appendix B (Part 2): Perspectives on FBA School Personnel's Interview Questions

(Teachers and Intervention Specialists)

1. What student behavior problem(s) have you found to be most prevalent in the classroom?
2. How would you describe Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBA)?
3. What has been your role when an FBA is needed?
4. How confident are you with identifying the purpose or function of student challenging behaviors?
5. How has your school implemented PBIS?
6. Describe the type of training you had in FBA/BIP?
7. Describe the type of training you had in classroom management?
    a. Share your perspective about the following statement.
8. When it comes to student challenging behavior issues in the classroom I would rather a district support person (school psych/specialists) apply interventions.
9. Are there any other comments you would like to make?

Probing Questions

 # 4 above: Could you share an example of your experience implementing FBA? Or as a team member.

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

Concordia University–Portland Institutional Review Board
Approved: August 15, 2019; will Expire: August 15, 2020

Research Study Title: Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA): Putting the Function into FBA
Principal Investigator: Mildred Albert
Research Institution: Concordia University–Portland
Faculty Advisor: Donna Graham, PhD

Purpose and what you will be doing:

The purpose of this study is to explore how school personnel perceive Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBA). We expect approximately 15 volunteers. No one will be paid to be in the study. We will begin enrollment on October 28, 2019 and end enrollment on November 15, 2019.

To be in this phase of study, you will be asked to

- Participate in an individual interview (45−60 minutes)
- Participate in a focus group. (60−90 minutes)

Doing these things should take less than three hours of your time. The individual and focus groups will be conducted according to the participants' availability.

Risks:

There are no risks to participating in this study other than providing your information. However, we will protect your information. Any personal information you provide will be coded so it cannot be linked to you. Any name or identifying information you give will be kept securely via electronic encryption and stored in a locked storage. When we or any of our investigators look at the data, none of the data will have your name or identifying information. We will refer to your data with a code that only the principal investigator knows links to you. This way, your identifiable information will not be stored with the data. We will not identify you in any publication or report. Interviews/Focus Group will be audio recorded. Recordings will be deleted immediately following transcription. All other study-related materials will be kept securely for 3 years from the close of the study and will then be destroyed.

Benefits:

Information you provide will benefit the field of education. School personnel will benefit from gaining a deeper understanding that will emerge from exploring the FBA phenomenon. Specifically, in the area of skill and practice. Student discipline (school-wide behavioral supports) include the use of FBA as best practice. IDEA is a federal law. FBA is an IDEA mandate that should be implemented in certain situations to address challenging student behavior.

Confidentiality:

This information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential. The only exception to this is if you tell us abuse or neglect that makes us seriously concerned for your immediate health and safety.

While I will keep information you share confidential in any publication or report, I cannot guarantee everything you say will be held private due to the nature of focus groups. Therefore, if you want to share something that you would not like to tie to yourself or others you are encouraged to speak about it in a general manner.

Right to Withdraw:

Your participation is greatly appreciated, but we acknowledge that the questions we are asking are personal in nature. You are free at any point to choose not to engage with or stop the study. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. This study is not required and there is no penalty for not participating. If at any time you experience a negative emotion from answering the questions, we will stop asking you questions.

Contact Information:

You will receive a copy of this consent form. If you have questions you can talk to or write the principal investigator, Mildred Albert at email [redacted]. If you want to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the director of our institutional review board, Dr. OraLee Branch (email obranch@cu-portland.edu or call 503-4936390).

Your Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and my questions were answered. I volunteer my consent for this study.

_____	_____
Participant Name	Date
_____	_____
Participant Signature	Date
_____	_____
Investigator Name	Date
_____	_____
Investigator Signature	Date

Investigator: Mildred Albert; email: [redacted]
c/o: Professor Donna Graham, PhD;
Concordia University–Portland
2811 NE Holman Street
Portland, Oregon 97211

Appendix D: Perspectives on FBA Focus Group Questions

1. Describe your job responsibilities and give your position title.
1. 2.What intervention(s) do you use when addressing student challenging behavior?
2. Finish the following sentence. “When addressing student challenging behavior; I understand how to identify the purpose or cause of the unwanted behavior by . . . ”
3. A most important part of an FBA is determining what triggered or condition maintained a challenging behavior. What condition have you observed in yours or another classroom environment that contributed to maintaining a student’s challenging behavior?
4. Describe any teams you have collaborated with to address student academic and or behavioral issues.
5. How has the district implemented SWPBIS?
6. What role does parents have in the implementation of PBIS?
    a. Are there any other comments you would like to make?

Appendix E: Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously-researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

Statement of academic integrity.

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

Explanations:

What does "fraudulent" mean?

"Fraudulent" work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one's own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate's final work without full and complete documentation.

What is "unauthorized" assistance?

"Unauthorized assistance" refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another's work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

Statement of Original Work (Continued)

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University–Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.

2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*.

Mildred D. Albert

Digital Signature

Mildred D. Albert

Name (Typed)

March 18, 2020

Date