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The Perceptions of School Counselors, Special Education Teachers, and Principals on their Preparedness to be on Anti-Bullying Policies Actors for Students with Disabilities

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The Perceptions of School Counselors, Special Education Teachers, and Principals on
their Preparedness to be on Anti-Bullying Policies Actors for Students with Disabilities

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my family. To my mother, Mamie Pearson, thank you for always supporting me in my endeavors. To my siblings, Charlie, Corine, Catherine, Glorine, Barbara, Glendell and Roman, thanks for your calls, inquiries and words of encouragement during this challenging process. At times, your enthusiasm and excitement levels matched or exceeded mine.

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I began my doctoral journey six years ago. During this time, there have been many individuals who gave me support and encouragement. My academic advisor Dr. Doyle Stevick, believed in me when I did not believe in myself. He encouraged me to press forward when I felt like I had depleted all energy. He tirelessly contacted me whenever there was a gap in communication. I would not have completed my degree without Dr. Stevick's help. I would also like to thank my dissertation committee, Dr. Ryan Carlson, Dr. Edward Cox and Dr. Rhonda Jeffries. Their support fostered a seamless transition from proposal to defense, and they were extremely helpful in providing valuable feedback regarding my research. Finally, thanks to Dr. Carolyn Rogers for editing my writing.

ABSTRACT

Effective bullying prevention programs are essential for schools, particularly with respect to students with disabilities (SWD). Improving the preparedness of counselors, special education teachers and principals can advance efforts to recognize and to address the bullying of students with disabilities. Unfortunately, schools' disciplinary processes and procedures are often complex and diffuse, and school stakeholders often know little about preventative methods for bullying and supportive measures for the victims. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of counselors, special education teachers and principals in middle schools on their preparedness to be effective anti-bullying policy actors. This research is based upon Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), which argues that individual thoughts, motivation and actions are rooted in whether they believe they can or cannot perform a task. This qualitative, phenomenological study examined the perceptions of three counselors, three special education teachers and three principals, one each from three middle schools, on their school's anti-bullying programs. Data were generated from interviews, document review, and a survey of the participants. The findings addressed the teachers' perceptions of their lack of knowledge and strategies working with bullying in general and bullying students with disabilities. Further, the participants felt that they were effective in preventing bullying and intervening in bullying situations. Insights from this study will benefit school leaders in implementing anti-bullying programs.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Bullying of students with disabilities (SWD) has occurred with increasing frequency and often with tragic results (Blake, Lund, Zhou, Kwok, & Benz, 2012). Little focus is given to the rate and extent to which students with disabilities in particular are bullied. Few preventative measures are put in place to protect students with disabilities, and few studies have been done to highlight incidences of bullying involving students with disabilities (Eckes & Gibbs, 2012).

School counselors, special education teachers and principals play major roles in the protection of students with disabilities. School officials' minimal preparations in students with disabilities and efforts to prevent bullying of students with disabilities have resulted in schools with no school-wide anti-bullying program or anti-bullying programs that are not specific to students with disabilities. Without these programs, students with disabilities are marginalized, and their needs regarding bullying are not met. Many schools have not developed an adequate corrective plan, compensatory education (Maag & Katsiyannis, 2012) or have not fully utilized their resources to provide bullying prevention and interventions to protect students with disabilities (Raskauskas & Modell, 2011).

Bullying has been defined in many ways, but for the purposes of this study, bullying is understood as any repeated negative behavior on the part of one or more

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individuals with the intent to harm that includes an actual or perceived power imbalance (Olweus, 1993). Bullying impacts the victim, bystanders, and in some extreme cases, the entire school. Schools have a responsibility to provide and maintain a safe learning environment for students with disabilities. School officials who view bullying acts as a persistent danger move swiftly to put interventions and preventative measures in place to combat bullying of all students.

Background of the Study

Students with disabilities are bullied at a rate of 34.1% higher than their non-disabled peers (Blake et al., 2012). Students with disabilities are bullied more frequently than is often understood and with greater intensity than the reporting shows. Multiple studies show that students with disabilities are bullied more often than nondisabled students (Didden, Scholte, Korzilius, de Moor, Vermeulen, O'Reilly, & Lancioni, 2009; Maag & Katsiyannis, 2012; O'Connor, 2012; Rose & Espelage, 2012). Incidents involving bullying of students with disabilities have become serious problems. Many bullying incidents have led to student isolation, truancy, low self-esteem, self-injuries, and suicide (Farmer, Reinke, & Brooks, 2014). While cases exist throughout the United States and abroad, the next two studies highlight bullying of specific students with disabilities.

A study by Rose, Swearer and Espelage (2012) concerned the case of Asher Brown, a 13-year-old eighth grader with Asperger syndrome who was allegedly subjected to incessant verbal and physical bullying from his classmates. This victimization stemmed from his sexual orientation, religion, and disability status. The pervasive victimization, which culminated with one of Asher's peers kicking him down a flight of

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stairs and knocking his books out of his hands, prompted his suicidal ideations. In Asher's final hours, he informed his father that he was gay, and soon after that died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

A second study was conducted by the Anti-Bullying Alliance in 2010. An online survey was conducted that polled the parents and families of children with disabilities about the extent to which their children had been bullied. One parent responded to the survey by saying his daughter reported that her schoolmates called her contagious, and she observed them brush her germs off them when she touched them or brushed against them. She was scorned by her schoolmates as she struggled to dress in gym class. Another parent wrote that her son was bullied because of his poor coordination. Shortly after both incidents, both children started to concoct excuses not to attend school on a regular basis. While children are bullied for a range of characteristics, the impacts of bullying can be similar and traumatic, making it important for the school to have people prepared to take systemic action to respond to incidents and to prevent future bullying. The importance of having educational stakeholders prepared has gained federal attention.

Federal laws hold schools accountable for the safety and security of students with disabilities. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates that school districts provide a free appropriate education (FAPE) to students with disabilities. While the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 also mandate that schools provide a FAPE to students with disabilities, these laws also protect exceptional needs students from discrimination and ensure them access to public service (Eckes, & Gibbs, 2012). Unfortunately, bullying incidents often result in students with disabilities isolating them from the general education environment and thus

limiting their opportunities to learn social skills from their peers (Mishna, 2003). Schools are in violation of federal laws when bullying and harassing behaviors interfere with students with disabilities' critical advancement (Raskauskas, & Modell, 2011) and their right to access FAPE. Eckes and Gibbs (2012) stated that school districts are deliberately indifferent, act in "bad faith" or in "gross misjudgment" when they fail to take reasonable steps to eliminate harassment. School districts that violate the educational rights of students with disabilities are subjected to litigation.

Although the building-level principal is responsible for monitoring systems and procedures and facilitating services for students with disabilities (Pazey & Cole, 2013), most principals have not taken the lead to ensure that students with disabilities are protected from bullying. When students with disabilities are bullied, schools should be prepared to respond swiftly and appropriately to address the issue. Because principals cannot effectively lead and supervise all of the programs in their schools, they delegate assignments to their staff according to their staff's expertise and roles within the building. Schools are staffed with dedicated professionals with a wealth of knowledge in various areas. When appropriate, administrators delegate responsibilities to the staff based on their experience, awareness, and exceptional skills (Wingfield, Reese, & West-Olatunji, 2010). Principals who delegate responsibilities to others exemplify characteristics of mature leadership (Rooney, 2013). Many principals have not assigned school counselors and special education teachers as leaders of anti-bullying programs, where they would serve as policy actors. Even though counselors and special education teachers may be the best equipped to lead anti-bullying programs, but they often lack the recommended preparation in bullying prevention.

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As the lack of training in bullying prevention suggests, both antibullying policies and preparation to lead and to implement them are relatively recent phenomena. For example, Vail (2009) notes that before the Columbine High School shooting on April 20, 1999 "No states had anti-bullying policies or required districts to have them" (p. 43). South Carolina, where this study was conducted, adopted a policy on January 1, 2007, a decade before the study, requiring all South Carolina school districts to adopt and implement a Safe School Climate Act (Hallford, 2009). The goal of the Safe School Climate Act is to protect students from harassment, intimidation, or bullying. It also mandates that school districts create bullying prevention programs to protect all students (Terry, 2010).

When students with disabilities receive school-based counseling for school or home related problems, one of their first points of contact is the school counselor or the special education teacher. Counselors and special education teachers are positioned at the top of the list of primary responders when students with disabilities are bullied. Providing school counselors and special teachers the opportunity to participate in the anti-bullying professional development and including them as members of anti-bullying policy committees coincide with the following sections of the Safe School Climate Act (2006):

1. Information regarding a local school district policy against harassment, intimidation, or bullying must be incorporated into a school's employee training program. Training also should be provided to school volunteers who have significant contact with students.

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2. Schools and school districts are encouraged to establish bullying prevention programs and other initiatives involving school staff, students, administrators, volunteers, parents, law enforcement, and community members. (p. 3)

Legislators of the Safe School Climate Act recommended but did not require school districts to include all school stakeholders in the establishment of bullying prevention programs (Terry, 2010). As a result, school leaders may be reluctant or slow to create bullying prevention programs. Recommended actions are implemented at varied levels of importance in school districts. For the most part, school leaders interpret laws precisely as written. These leaders are not inclined to ask questions of lawmakers that would lead to a meaningful dialogue that would explain boundaries of the laws. These practices lend minimal creativity, lack of inclusion, and unfavorable outcomes to a program.

Problem Statement

Little was known about how counselors, special education teachers and principals perceive the bullying of students with disabilities in their schools and their own preparedness to address it. What safeguards were in place, anti-bullying practices and approaches, and what type of training and knowledge had the counselors, special education teachers and principals had on anti-bullying approaches? How prepared did they feel to be effective policy actors for anti-bullying efforts?

Without such program, guides and models in place, school leaders continuously find themselves having to address bullying situations. School leaders are faced with the fact that the scenes in schools are changing; while the literature on bullying is extensive, strategies to prevent bullying are not always understood (Rallis & Goldring, 2000). Data

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show that building-level principals do not have consistent and cohesive preparation in the area of students with disabilities (Henderson-Black, 2009).

Studies and discussions of students with disabilities are seldom a fundamental part of administration preparation programs, and the subject is rarely written, spoken, or debated in coursework (Pazey & Cole, 2013). School administrators' program of study typically excludes comprehensive knowledge of special education or procedures for ensuring the needs of students with disabilities are met and their rights protected (Henderson-Black, 2009). Principals gain their most knowledge of students with disabilities and issues facing these students when problems occur. Based on the nature of the problem, principals seek help from special education teachers or outside support from the school district office.

Most counselors have not received the formal preparation necessary to manage bullying incidents involving students with disabilities. Many school districts place the responsibility on school counselors to create their system for working with students with disabilities (Adorno & Wittmer, 2000). For the majority of counselors, on the job training is effectively through trial and error, or they pursue their own professional development (Myers, 2004). Charlton (2009) suggested that school counselors are most effective when they address preventive programs that focus on bullying; however, there is no clear guideline or emphasis placed on developing anti-bullying programs that specifically address students with disabilities. One major problem is that many school counselors lack relevant information, have limited prior exposure, or are under-informed regarding bullying programs for students with disabilities. This lack of knowledge further inhibits

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counselors in their ability to manage bullying incidents involving students with disabilities effectively.

In contrast, special education teachers have knowledge of students with disabilities and have received the fundamental training in special education; however, special education teachers generally lack bullying prevention training that is specific to students with disabilities. When special needs teachers receive bullying prevention training, their practice focuses on school-wide preventions (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, O'Brennan, & Gulemetova, 2013). The complementary skill-sets of counselors and special education teachers could together help to address the issue, but only if the leadership sees the need to combine these skills to address the problem directly.

Counselors and school leaders lack knowledge of students with disabilities, and their unique needs pose a problem to the design of a comprehensive anti-bullying program. The preparation building-level principals and school counselors receive related to students with disabilities are minimal in comparison the training they receive for the general education population. Principals are charged with protecting and educating a sub-group of students with whom they have had little or no preparation. Furthermore, principals are expected to assign school counselors the duties of counseling and protecting this sub-group of students from bullying. When students with disabilities are bullied, many schools do not intervene enough or effectively. These school officials do not recognize that there is a problem to address. Counselors may be the best equipped, but they often lack preparation of SWD, thus lies the problem for all.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of counselors, special education teachers and principals about their preparedness to be effective policy actors with respect to the bullying of students with disabilities. The findings can support better preparation of policy actors for the prevention of bullying of students with disabilities. This study also considers current anti-bullying policies and programs and preventions and interventions specially designed to protect students with disabilities.

This qualitative study was informed by the researcher's first-hand, internal observations of school counselors' and special education teachers' involvement in anti-bullying programs. In the course of the larger study, the research also sought to understand the extent to which principals involved school counselors and special education teachers as policy actors for anti-bullying programs, to identify the preparation that counselors and special education teachers received in order to manage bullying incidents involving students with disabilities, and to gather counselors' and principals' self-assessments of their knowledge of students with disabilities.

Additionally, this study examined the various responsibilities of school leaders, counselors and special education teachers with respect to anti-bullying policies. Each school principal is responsible for the daily operation of his or her school. Effective operations require strong leadership. Counselors work closely with school leaders to create, implement, and support anti-bullying policies and school bullying programs (American School Counseling Association, 2003). School counselors are inherently included in anti-bullying policy decisions because they have specific roles in the prevention and intervention of crime (Austin, Reynolds, & Barnes, 2012). The primary

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duty of a counselor is to serve as a school leader, advocate for students, and work collaboratively with other stakeholders to ensure that students attend safe schools and experience academic success (American School Counseling Association, 2003). School leaders, counselors, and teachers are all equally in charge of students' learning.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do counselors, special education teachers and principals perceive the bullying of students with disabilities in their schools?

2. How do school counselors, special education teachers and principals explain the bullying of students with disabilities and what do they think can be done about it?

3. Do counselors, special education teachers and principals believe that they have the necessary background, training, authority and knowledge of best practices to be effective policy actors regarding the bullying of students with disabilities?

Significance of the Study

The topic of bullying is drawing more attending in light of the number of children harming themselves due to the pain inflicted upon them. This study is significant for understanding how critical stakeholders in schools perceive the bullying of students with disabilities as a problem and the support provided to educators to address it. Students with disabilities have conditions that adversely affect their educational performance (IDEA, 2004) and their quality of life. In most situations, these students need accommodations, guidance, support, and modifications as they transition through school.

Special needs students who are bullied tend to have low self-esteem, are insecure, lack social skills (Eckes, & Gibbs, 2012), and perform poorly in school (Ma, Stewin, & Mah, 2001). These students tend to be passive and display timid behaviors (Sabornie, 1994). These disadvantages make students with disabilities vulnerable to bullying and harassment. Schools districts that take precautionary measures to prevent bullying of students with disabilities provide safety and security to the entire school. In such cases, all students are provided a learning environment that is safe and orderly.

Schools are legally responsible for providing safety and security to students with disabilities. Anti-bullying programs that have specially designed components for exceptional needs students satisfy schools' legal obligations. While these programs are designed to help reduce bullying and harassment of students with disabilities, there is little evidence that supports a reduction in bullying at schools.

Definition of Terms

The following are summaries of definitions used in this study:

Bullying. Bullying is any repeated negative behavior on the part of one or more individuals with the intent to harm that includes an actual or perceived power imbalance (Olweus, 1993).

Bullies. Bullies have high levels of self-esteem and low levels of anxiety and insecurity (Olweus, 2007) and use power to control their victims.

Bystanders. Bystanders are passive bullies, followers or henchmen (Olweus, 1993) and they may be reluctant to get involved with bullying acts.

Category of Disabilities. There are multiple categories of disabilities: a list used can be found in Appendix C.

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Cyberbullying. Cyberbullying involves the use of electronic communication technology to taunt, tease and threaten their victims (Diamanduros, Downs, & Jenkins, 2008).

Mainstreaming. Mainstreaming is the effort by schools to include students with disabilities in activities and classrooms designed for nondisabled students for the purpose of greater integration and inclusion (McLaughlin, 2010).

Physical bullying. Physical bullying is the act of using physical contact to cause harm and discomfort to another individual (Guillory, 2013)

Relational bullying. Relational bullying is purposefully omitting someone, spreading rumors and damaging his or her reputation (Jacobsen & Bauman, 2007).

Self-Efficacy. Self-Efficacy is the belief in one's ability to influence events that affect one's life and control over the way these events are experienced (Bandura, 1997).

School Counselors. According to the American School Counselor Association's (2005), school counselors are master's-level licensed professionals trained in the development of children, prevention of children's problems, intervention strategies to correct problems and prevent their escalation, as well as to provide crisis intervention. School counselors support teachers and other staff in decision making, support and assist students, and work with school staff, families, and members of the community as an integral part of the education program.

Verbal bullying. Verbal bullying is an attack that is not physical but uses language inappropriately, such as name calling, threatening, and spreading malicious rumors (Guillory, 2013).

Victim. The victim of bullying is often smaller in statue, younger, physically weaker (Earhart, 2011; Olweus, 1993; Voss & Mulligan, 2000), and many have some disability.

Limitations of the Study

This study has the following limitations:

1. The study lasted for a period of 70 days, limiting its longitudinal perspective.

2. Because surveys and interviews were the primary methods used in this study, there is some vulnerability to systematic bias (Maxwell, 2013).

3. It may be awkward for the participants who are responsible for discipline to acknowledge and discuss openly any substantive or systemic problems related to bullying.

4. The researcher acknowledges a strong, emotional link to the broader topic, which both motivated the study and may potentially bias the findings.

Nature of the Study

This study employed qualitative methods, specifically a phenomenological Moustakas, (1994), a leading authority in phenomenological research, believes that qualitative research is appropriate when the purpose of the study is to gain a deeper understanding of a given phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological research is suitable for studies that explore in depth the experiences of educators (Moustakas, 1994). This method was applied to understand the experiences of special education teachers, counselors, and principal as they share perceptions of bullying and of themselves as policy actors in their schools. It is hoped that the findings will help educators and policy-makers to reduce the bullying of students with disabilities (Hoepfl, 1997).

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"Phenomenological inquiry, or qualitative research, uses a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings" (Hoepfl, 1997, p. 1). The ability of the qualitative phenomenological researcher to describe the lived experiences of participants in a phenomenon is an essential consideration for the research study.

Conceptual Framework

Creating a conceptual framework for the study was essential to ensure that the findings are as conclusive as possible (Hertz, 1999). Hertz conducted a study in the mid-1980s and found that his study was not long enough to detect some key aspects. He concluded, "even carefully collected results can be misleading if the underlying context of assumptions is wrong" (1984, p. 151). For this reason, the conceptual framework of a study is necessary to support and inform research (Robson, 2002). Miles and Huberman (1994) note that the conceptual framework "explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied—the key factors, concepts, or variables—and the presumed relationships among them" (p. 18).

In this conceptual framework (Figure 1.1), the goal of the study is supported by three research questions. The purpose and the research questions determine the method to use in the study. The conceptual framework is informed by Bandura's theory of Social Cognitive Theory (SCT). SCT explains the self-efficacy (Charlton, 2009) and it is applied here to think about the confidence levels of principals, school counselors, and special education teachers to manage the bullying of students with disabilities.

According to this theory, individuals' conduct is rooted in their beliefs about whether they can or cannot perform a task. When individuals think they can perform a task, they are much more likely to move forward with it (Bandura, 1977a, 1986). When

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individuals believe they cannot perform a task, they often withdraw and seem to accept the current situation. These individuals may appear satisfied with and are accepting of a positive or negative outcome. When such complacency sets in, progress becomes difficult. Social cognitive theory addresses how complacency becomes normalized in an organization.

The conceptual framework thus emerges out of a broader story-line or set of expectations about what the real situation is in schools and what the researcher expects to discover. These expectations are informed by the researchers' own experiences and by a systematic review of the literature. The data are gathered and analyzed systematically in order to see whether these expectations (assumptions or hypotheses) were in fact correct.

In overall terms, it is hypothesized that the bullying of students with disabilities is a serious problem, but that it may not be widely recognized as such. As such, the study considers whether counselors, special-education teachers, and principals see it as a problem in their schools. When they do not see significant problems about bullying of students with disabilities, three issues may be at work. First, the situation may be good, and a caring atmosphere that protects students with special needs exists. Such cases may offer exemplary practices for others to emulate. Identifying such cases can be valuable for future research. Second, there may be problems, but the participants may not be trained, prepared or sensitized to recognize those problems among individuals (especially among students who cannot express themselves and their challenges easily) or systemically (if there are not clear data-gathering systems or effective communication among actors.) To understand these possibilities, the study asks about their level of preparation and confidence on these issues. Third, key actors may not be in position to

apply their expertise to recognize or address the problems (an issue of how the leadership deploys the staff's expertise). To understand this element, the study looks at the programs and procedures in place, together with the confidence of the actors to address them.

Due to the relatively recent history of anti-bullying policies, I expected that the diverse age ranges present in most schools, particularly with principals, would mean that few had systematic training about implementing anti-bullying policies during their coursework, and in addition, many school leaders lack training in their professional programs on working with students with disabilities. Counselors may also lack training in working with students with disabilities. While some of these gaps may have been addressed in subsequent professional development, I expected to find at best, piecemeal training, and as a result, low levels of confidence for any individual to feel like a well-informed policy actor prepared to lead efforts to address bullying for students with disabilities. More specifically, effective policies of these kinds seemed to me to need the complementary expertise of these three types of school employees—principals, counselors, and special education teachers—but I feared that few principals would have the level of preparation or sensitization to be aware that such cooperative structures were needed. In addition, I was concerned that the demands on these officials and hierarchical nature of schooling likely precluded the possibility that such cooperative leadership structures already existed or allowed for well-prepared teachers or counselors to assert leadership in this area.

Finally, a person's self-efficacy is a product not just of their individual skill set and perspective, but of whether they find themselves to be in a climate conducive to their using their own abilities or taking a leadership role. So, their beliefs about their self-

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efficacy, which will shape their actions, are interrelated with the leadership practices and structures in place. In sum, I did not expect to find any individual actors who felt a high-level of self-efficacy to lead in this area, to recognize problems that did exist individually and systemically, or to be in a position that is particularly conducive to them doing so. This conceptual framework thus includes ideas about the empirical and normative realms, both the real situation I expected to find and my beliefs about what would be necessary and should happen to enact the kinds of policies that I believe are needed to make a difference in the bullying experienced by students with disabilities. The design map used in this study. A design map is a template or diagram for conceptually mapping the study and displaying the central parts of the study (Maxwell, 2013).

Researcher's Positionality

The researcher's position in relation to this study is that of an insider with an attached positionality. The researcher is a special education coordinator for a public school district and has worked in this field for twenty-three years. This research is constructed by the researcher and is influenced by the connection the researcher has to the world being investigated. Anderson (2013) maintains the author or researcher in a study should consider that knowledge presented in the research is self-constructed by the author's connection to the world and is socially constructed based on the author's experience. The researcher has taken on the position of Anderson.

The Perceptions of School Counselors, Special Education Teachers, and Principals on their Preparation and Leadership on Anti-Bullying Policies for Students with Disabilities

Goals

> to examine the perceptions school counselors, special education teachers and principals have on their preparation for working with students with disabilities

> to investigate the role of counselors, special education teachers, and principals regarding leadership on implementing anti-bullying policies and practices

> to add to the existing body of knowledge regarding counselors, special education teachers, and principal preparations

Conceptual Framework

> The majority of school counselors and principals have not received the necessary training *regarding SWD*

> *Student with disabilities in middle schools are bullied at a higher rate than their non-disabled peers*, and the safeguards in place to protect them are being implemented

> Albert Bandura's SCT

Research Questions

1. How do counselors, special education teachers and principals perceive the bullying of students with disabilities?

2. How do counselors, special education teachers and principals explain why students with disabilities are bullied, and, what do they think can be done about it?

3. Do counselors, special education teachers and principals believe that they have the preparation, training, authority and knowledge of best practices to be effective policy actors regarding the bullying of students with disabilities?

Methods

Surveys

Interviews

Transcription

Coding

Findings

Validity

Threats:

> Length of study

> Interviews and surveys only instruments for gathering data)

> Varied responses

> Access to respondents

On the design map, the solid arrows represent intended impact of one component on another component. The broken arrows represent potential post - findings adjustments.

Figure 1.1: Anti-bullying policies. Design adapted from Joseph A. Maxwell's Marine Research Technology Design Map (Maxwell, 2013, p. 10).

The social connection and personal experiences of the researcher to this study may influence the type questions asked by the researcher and the answers given by the responders. Interviews were used with this methodology to provide an in-depth description and understanding of the lived experiences of special education teachers,

Organization of the Study

This research was organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 introduced the problem, the background of the study, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the significance of the study, the definition of terms, the limitations of the study, the conceptual framework and the organization of the remainder of the study.

Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 review the literature on the topic of bullying and elaborated the methods for collecting and analyzing the data. The final two chapters provides the analysis of the findings and the conclusions. Specifically, Chapter 4 presents demographic data, the analysis of the data and the findings. Chapter 5 consists of a summary of the research findings, conclusions, implications, and recommendations.

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CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter reviews the relevant literature for understanding the bullying of students with disabilities who are victimized. This chapter thus covers: (a) categories of disabilities most frequently bullied; (b) mainstreaming students with disabilities; (c) anti-bullying laws and programs; (d) school counselors leading anti-bullying programs; (e) modifications for students with disabilities; and (f) self-efficacy and components of the SCT. Additionally, this review of literature examined literature on the practice of principals appointing counselors as leaders of anti-bullying programs, school counselors' preparation for counseling students with disabilities and to develop effective bullying interventions for these students, and professional preparation with respect to students with disabilities.

Targeted Categories of Bullying

This literature reviewed shows that the most frequently bullied students fit the categories of learning disability, mental disability, intellectual disability, autism, other health impairment (attention deficit disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), and speech and language disorders.

Students with disabilities have a higher risk of being targeted by a bully than non-disabled students. Experts agree that students with disabilities are two to three times more likely to be victims of bullying than their counterparts (Rose & Espelage, 2012). Students

who have some obvious physical or cognitive disabilities are more susceptible to being bullied than students without disabilities (Maag & Katsiyannis, 2012). Flynt and Morton (2004) stated that students who bully prey on students with disabilities because such students display signs of weakness. In most cases, vulnerability attracts unwelcomed negative attention. These students are often socially unskilled (Fox & Boulton, 2005). Poor social skills contribute to the large number of students with disabilities within the bullying arena (Rose & Espelage, 2012). In the eyes of students who bully, students with disabilities lack social skills may be signs of weakness, thus, resulting in hastening or acceleration of verbal or physical abuse (Flynt & Morton, 2004). Social dominance (Akrami, Ekehammar, Claesson, & Sonnander, 2005) of this nature may result in students with disabilities being socially rejected by their peers. This type of rejection causes students to foster negative attitudes and to socially isolate themselves. Verbal and physical abuse often causes these perceptions. Repeated incidents of this nature ultimately result in long-term and sometimes permanent psychological and physiological damage to students with disabilities.

Students who bully carry out aggressive acts repeatedly against victims who are unable to defend themselves (Didden et al., 2009). The victims often appear physically and mentally weaker than students who bully. Students with disabilities, by definition, are limited in one or more of these capacities. They rarely have the articulation skills needed to express themselves or the defensive abilities necessary to effectively ward off students who bully. Consistent with past research, Didden et al. (2009) stated that

(a) bullying occurs in adolescents with severe intellectual disability, (b)

prevalence of bullying is high in children with autism who are between 4-17 years

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old, and (c) bullying is relatively common in students with intellectual disabilities who are between 12-21 years of age, whereby victimization is associated with high levels of emotional and interpersonal problems, and bullies and victims/bullies showed increasing levels of challenging behaviors. (p. 147)

Fox and Boulton (2005) stated that students with disabilities tend to demonstrate an anxious vulnerability which makes them susceptible to students who bully. Additional data support the effects bullying has on students with specific disabilities. Individuals with learning disabilities (Baumeister, Storch, & Geffken, 2008) and special health care needs (Maag & Katsiyannis, 2012) may be peer victimized at higher levels than other students their age. A national study of 920 middle and high-school students with an autism disorder revealed that 46% of them had been bullied (O'Connor, 2012). Students with speech and language disorders are more likely to be bullied than any other students (Davis, Howell, & Cooke, 2002) because they are less able to defend themselves verbally. Another study showed that students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) experience higher frequencies of bullying than students without ADHD (Wiener & Mak, 2009). The available research illustrates that students with disabilities are disproportionately the victims of bullying (Marini, Fairbairn, & Zuber, 2001; O'Connor, 2012; Sheard, Clegg, Standen, & Cromby, 2001; Singer, 2005).

Mainstreaming Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities were granted rights in 1975 by federal legislation; these rights were created exclusively for school-age disabled children. As stated in Public Law 94 - 142, all school-age handicapped children are guaranteed a "free and appropriate" educational experience in the "least restrictive environment" (LRE) (Taft & Evans,

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1989). Under the guidelines of Public Law 94 – 142, students with disabilities are granted the added benefit of mainstreaming. The 1997 Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) initiated mandates for accountability for students with disabilities. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) is the largest and most comprehensive federal education law for public schools (Ayers, 2011). One main thrust of the law is to ensure that students with disabilities who are mainstreamed receive more of a quality education and have a fair chance at becoming productive citizens than do self-contained students.

ESEA was created to ensure that students with disabilities have an equal opportunity for full integration or inclusion in activities and policies designed for nondisabled students (McLaughlin, 2010). The reauthorization of the ESEA of 2001 required states to include students with disabilities as a subgroup in state and district assessments and report their participation and performance to determine whether schools make adequate yearly progress (AYP) (Harr-Robins, Song, Hurlburt, Pruce, Danielson, & Garet, 2013). Before the 1997 school year, students with disabilities were not included in schools' academic assessment reports as were general education students. President Barack Obama reinforced the commitment to ensure that all children will be able to contribute as citizens in the U.S. democracy and to prosper in a global economy (Department of Education, 2010). Individuals who served on the ESEA board believed that the most well-educated Americans are the most significant element in preserving this nation's productivity and global leadership and in shaping students to contribute to their communities and this nation to their fullest potential (U.S. Senate Committee on Health, 2011).

Federal lawmakers created goals that are designed to maximize the equality of education for these individuals to ensure that disabled individuals receive an equal and appropriate public education and services. Essentially, these goals address formal education and post-secondary living. Four main pillars are the basis for all federal laws and other policies about children and adults with disabilities (Silverstein, 2000). Turnbull (2005) listed the four primary goals as (a) ensuring equality of opportunity; (b) full participation; (c) economic self-sufficiency; and (d) independent living.

The IDEA of 2004 is a United States national law that ensures services to 11% of students, or approximately 6.7 million, that have been identified as having a disability (Finkel, 2011). According to Finkel (2011), federal data that were collected in fall 2008 show that approximately 1.5% of children with developmental delays who received services under IDEA were in separate schools, while 37% in regular schools but spent at least 20% of the time in a secluded area. The remaining 62% were primarily mainstreamed into regular education at least 80% of the time (Finkel, 2011). The implementation of IDEA 2004 and ESEA placed more children with disabilities, who would otherwise have been placed in a self-contained setting, within proximity to general education children. The goal of inclusive education is to attempt to educate, accept, and include all juveniles into its educational system (Nowicki, 2003). The combined objectives of IDEA 2004 and the ESEA are to provide exceptional needs students with a sense of exposure, normalcy, and self-confidence through mainstreamed educational experiences. These laws offer a unique opportunity for students with disabilities to be included in the general sector. These laws were further designed to assist students with

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disabilities with capitalizing on their inclusion experience while simultaneously providing them with an environment with less restrictive boundaries.

Adversely, IDEA 2004 increased the probability that students with disabilities could become victims of abuse. Maag and Katsiyannis (2012) agreed with other researchers who state that students with disabilities who are in integrated settings are bullied at a higher rate than students in special education settings. O'Connor (2012) found "the risk of being bullied is greatest for high-functioning students who end up not in self-contained classes, but in mainstream classes, where their quirks and unusual mannerisms stand out, and they are more exposed to bullies" (para. 6). Research says that bullying is mean and malicious, and it has a profound and pervasive effect on the learning environment of a school (Whitted & Dupper, 2005). Unfortunately, federal laws that were designed to provide equal educational opportunities to all students have resulted in a wide range of abuse, and torment of our schools' most vulnerable group of students with disabilities. Additionally, these laws have placed further burden on school officials to ensure the fair treatment of students with disabilities (Darnell, personal communication, September 28, 2014).

Anti-Bullying Policies and Programs

The rash of severe nationwide bullying incidents has sparked the need for national and local laws and policies designed to protect victims of bullying. Greene and Ross stated that the Columbine High School massacre was one of the first high-profile incidents of violent behavior that appeared to portray bullying as a primary cause (as cited in Stuart-Cassel, Bell, & Springer, 2011 p. ix). The Columbine High School shooting encouraged school officials and policymakers to create and implement programs

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and policies that would avert violence in schools and guarantee school safety (Hong, Cho, Allen-Meares, & Espelage, 2011). This horrific incident brought about new legislative action within state and national legislatures that was designed to combat bullying behavior on school campuses or to lessen its effects (Stuart-Cassel, Bell, Springer, 2011).

In 2006, October was declared National Bullying Prevention Month. Throughout the month, there are student workshops led by teachers, social workers, and school resource officers. According to Kate Gorscak in an article anticipating October 2014, National Bullying Prevention Month informs "youth, those who work with youth, members of the media, parents, and schools"; she also lists many national activities including Facebook and Twitter events where they "collect stories of how individuals and communities are taking action in bullying prevention" (2014). Although October is just one month, the purpose is to bring awareness to bullying to stop it year-round.

Nonetheless, Vail (2009) stated that "In 1999, no states had anti-bullying policies or required districts to have them; but today, 39 states do" (p. 43). To further curtail bullying incidents, in 2004, the federal government initiated an anti-bullying crusade called Stop Bullying Now (Vail, 2009). Furlong, Morrison, and Greif, (2003) argued that "States that have experienced notable school shooting incidents are more likely to have formal school bullying laws than other states" (p. 460). The influx of volatile bullying behaviors and copycat incidents are the underlying reasons for the national push for prevention and interventions to protect innocent victims. States that have statutes specifically for bullying, most likely have programs that encompass anti-bullying

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programs as part of a broader approach to preventing and addressing bullying behavior (Good, McIntosh, & Gietz, 2011).

In 2009, Hallford found that thirty-eight states had created bullying prevention statutes. The twelve remaining states that had not mandated anti-bullying prevention laws were either in the initial planning stage or have no evidence on file that initiatives have been made to address the issue. According to Hallford (2009), "The three most common purposes of bullying laws are (a) to inform the public, (b) to investigate reports of bullying, and (c) to provide bullying prevention programs" (p. 67). Hallford (2009) referenced a South Carolina law that mandated all school districts adopt and implement a Safe School Climate Act by January 1, 2007.

States vary in their approaches to school safety laws, and legislation differs from state to state (Stanton & Beran, 2009). Following Hallford's 2009 study, the Legislative Response to Bullying, (para. 6) stated forty-eight states had passed anti-bullying legislation or anti-harassment laws which require school districts to take specific actions to address bullying (Eckes, & Gibbs, 2012). The National Conference of State Legislatures (2007) outlined supports to prohibit students from being bullied: definition of bullying; state-level support; school intervention strategies; individual reporting and immunity; public school reporting; parental rights; teacher and staff training; prevention task forces and programs; and integrated curriculum instruction" (para. 2).

Olweus (2007) recommended that schools use *Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP)* to help curtail bullying incidents. OBPP was originally used in 42 schools in Bergen, Norway in the mid-1980s (Limber, 2006; Olweus, 2007, 1993) after three 10 to 14-year-old boys committed suicide after they were allegedly bullied (Finn,

2008). Finn (2008) also found that OBPP addresses three levels of intervention: school-wide, classroom and individual.

In order address school-wide interventions, a questionnaire is used to interview students about their perception of bullying and to determine when bullying is usually observed in the school (Solberg & Olweus, 2003). A Bullying Prevention Coordination Committee (administrators, mental health professional, teacher and a least one parent) is also created at this level (Finn, 2008). The committee is trained and meets regularly to expand their knowledge about the program and discuss the program's success and its needs for improvement (Limber, 2006; Olweus, 1993).

At the classroom level, school rules concerning bullying are posted and are enforced (Finn, 2008). Olweus (1993) recommended that the following classroom rules be implemented at this level:

1. We shall not bully other students.

2. We shall try to help other students who are bullied.

3. We shall make a point to include students who become easily left out. (p. 82)

Finn (2008) stated that the classroom level provides individual, group or class level praise while sanctions may be adjusted to meet the needs of each child. Parents are included in classroom meetings that are held to discuss the bullying program, to plan for the subsequent weeks, and to evaluate the class conditions (Finn, 2008).

At the individual level, students who bully or are victims are dealt with individually and directly. Students who bully are told that bullying will not be accepted in the class or school, and the consequence of noncompliance is punitive (Olweus, 1993). In

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this level, the school builds a trusting rapport with the victims through supervision, communication, and parental contact (Finn, 2008).

Hanewinkel (2004) recommended the following actions prior to schools implementing OBPP:

- the head of the school should be motivated and able to encourage the staff

- the staff should have a consensus about what they want to change

- a co-coordination group should be established

- the program should be concrete and contain measures that are visible to the whole school (e.g., teachers on duty during the breaks). (p. 94)

Olweus's Bullying Prevention Program has defined classroom rules against bullying, states consequences for infractions and schedules discussion groups about bullying issues and peer relations (Olweus, 1993). His plan is designed to: (a) show warmth and interest in students; (b) set firm limits to unacceptable behavior; (c) use consistent, nonphysical non-hostile negative consequences for violation; and (d) act as authorities and positive role models (as cited in Limber, 2011, p. 72).

The creation and implementation of effective bullying prevention programs are time-consuming and require strategic planning. Everyone involved with the program needs extensive training in the program's design. Everyone involved with the program needs to know what to do and when to do it. Once all prerequisites have been established, principals must provide professional development for staff and faculty and provide opportunities for students to have input concerning their understanding of school climate (Austin et al., 2012). Espelage (2012) stated that schools should use social-emotional approaches to combat bullying behaviors. That is – teachers teach bullying prevention

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lessons at the same time weekly (Espelage, 2012). The purpose of the lessons is to prepare students about social responsibility and what it means to be socially responsible in an educational setting (Brunner & Lewis, 2008). Effective bullying programs also educate parents about time management and supervision of electronic devices because such devices may attribute to violent behaviors (Austin et al., 2012).

Several school districts have implemented a zero-tolerance policy when it comes to school bullying. Students are punished for any infraction of the rules through an in-school or out-of-school suspension or expulsion. Most zero-tolerance policies require that the bully and the victim be suspended pending investigation. For a zero-tolerance policy to be effective, everyone, including the bully, bystanders, victims, staff, and parents, must support the policy (Orecklin & Winters, 2000).

The majority of school campuses have implemented safety measures by being proactive in their quest to prevent bullying. Many campuses have increased the presence of real (adult supervision) and imagined barriers (visible reminders) within and around schools. Maxwell (2006) stated that many schools use real barriers by strategically placing more adults (i.e., staff members, principals, or parent volunteers) in less structured areas (DeVoe, Kaffenberger, & Chandler, 2005), such as outside doors, in hallways and parking lots. These individuals are trained and have group meetings where they learn to handle bullying problems (Alsaker, 2004; Newman-Carlson & Horne, 2004), and they are taught to recognize behaviors that might lead to potentially dangerous situations. They use imagined barriers or signs that remind students of school rules. They also have statements of consequences for specific behaviors around schools (Maxwell, 2006).

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Several schools incorporate the writing process as part of the curriculum and as a measure to predict bullying behaviors. The writing process serves two purposes – to teach writing skills and to provide an informal assessment of students' inner thoughts. Teachers use the writing process to encourage students to express their views and ideas about life with the anticipation of predicting inappropriate behaviors and being proactive to bullying behaviors (Oltman, 2010). Teachers usually create writing topics. However, teachers are encouraged to allow students to generate self-topics when there is a noticeable positive or negative change in behavior. There is no guarantee that the writing process will prevent all bullying behaviors. However, this multi-purpose process is a viable strategy for bullying prevention and interventions.

The use of barriers and the writing process are plausible steps to take to deter and predict low-level violent behaviors; however, there is a plethora of researchers who believe that effective bullying interventions should include school personnel, students, and local stakeholders. School personnel include, but are not limited to, teachers, social workers, counselors, and school administrators. Stakeholders also include parents, local agencies, and the community.

The goal of all schools is to have zero incidents of bullying. While this goal maybe unrealistic, schools should resort to best practices that will eliminate or reduce the breeding environment for bullying by adopting bullying prevention policies, programs, and interventions. Educators must accept the fact that bullying exists and take proactive measures to prevent its occurrence. Schools must establish an effective school policy that not only includes all stakeholders - but also is acceptable by all stakeholders (Austin et al., 2012). Staff must agree on what interventions are appropriate for specific incidents.

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Earhart (2011) contended that "Without appropriate early intervention, aggression in youth commonly escalates into later violence and other antisocial behavior" (p. 33).

School Counselors as Leaders of Anti-Bullying Programs

School leaders who assign school counselors as leaders of anti-bullying programs realize that school counselors receive more professional development on bullying prevention and anti-bullying policy implementation than school leaders (Barnes, 2010). These principals appoint counselors to lead anti-bullying programs, because they are professionally trained to recognize and respond to students who bully and their victims. Counselors are in positions to address awareness and provide intervention strategies for faculty, staff, students, and parents (Barnes, 2010) and provide support for bullying incidents. School counselors advocate for students and collaborate with stakeholders (students, teachers, parents, and community members) to ensure that students attend bully-free schools and experience academic success (ASCA, 2003).

In line with Marzano's leadership responsibilities, 'Input' provides the basis for school counselors to lead anti-bullying programs under the leadership of the school principal (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Counselors who are involved in the creation of the anti-bullying policy determine how to implement an effective school-wide bullying program and examine and initiate revisions to the existing policy. These counselors form a team of stakeholders to work collaboratively to respond to bullying incidents with the anticipation of eliminating bullying (American School Counseling Association, 2003).

Previous literature stated that most school counselors are excluded from serving on anti-bullying committees and have received little or no preparation related to students

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with disabilities (Bradshaw, Sawyer, & O'Brennan, 2007; Myers, 2004). School counselors' lack of involvement in anti-bullying policy decisions and lack of preparation in the area of students with disabilities present a challenging situation when it comes to addressing the safety of these students. These counselors are put in precarious situations as they rely on instinctive skills to manage bullying behaviors (Adorno & Wittmer, 2000; Myers, 2004). Researchers reported that school counselors, for the most part, use personal bullying management techniques (Adorno & Wittmer, 2000). As the number of bullying incidents of students with disabilities continues to grow, there is no basis to conclude that school counselors' bullying management strategies work.

Contrary to suggestions in previous studies, a study on school counselors and bullying revealed that counselors who received anti-bullying training were only more likely to intervene in relational bullying (omission, spreading rumors, damaging reputation). Differences were also recorded in the likelihood of an intervention between male and female counselors with similar training (Jacobsen & Bauman, 2007). Females are more likely to benefit from interventions in bullying incidents than males. These findings seem to point to the conclusion that training for counselors may not be a necessary anti-bullying strategy.

Modifications for Students with Disabilities

The previously mentioned anti-bullying policies, programs and interventions are cogent; however, they exclude modifications for students with disabilities (Raskauskas & Modell, 2011). Rose et al., (2012) suggested that the current bullying programs stress the importance of including all stakeholders. Students with disabilities are often excluded from the whole-school programming. According to Raskauskas, and Modell (2011),

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students need to be included in this process, including those students traditionally overlooked in bullying programs. Effective anti-bullying programs strategically include students with disabilities.

Rose et al., (2012) provided examples of ways schools can make modifications to include students with disabilities in anti-bullying programs:

An interpreter can be provided for any assembly or play; closed captioning can be used for videos; braille and enlarged type can be used for students with visual impairments; social stories can be used to increase social skill acquisition; structured cooperative learning groups can be used for behavioral modeling; specific, concrete and less abstract concepts can be used with students with intellectual disabilities; and examples that include students with disabilities can help make anti-bullying messaging more relevant for all students. (p. 7)

Schools can use a peer aspect to include students with disabilities in bullying prevention programs by assigning a general education student as a special needs student's Lunch Brunch Buddy (Rose et al., 2012). The goal of the Lunch Brunch Program is to foster a relationship between both individuals. Students establish a bond that might develop into a friendship. The association of the two students is likely to provide an imaginary shield of protection to the exceptional needs student and expand his circle of friends.

School districts that are creative in their pursuit to include students with disabilities in anti-bullying programs include stakeholders. These individuals attend collaborative meetings, goals must be established, and there must be benchmark evaluations to monitor the program's success. Most anti-bullying programs require

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planning and follow-through with little to no funding. Given the low cost, funding should not be a deterrent to development and implementation of a program (S. Darnell, personal communication, September 28, 2014).

Self-Efficacy and Social Cognitive Theory

While some school districts have appointed school counselors to lead anti-bullying programs and manage bullying behaviors, many counselors lack the confidence to handle such high-risk program effectively. An overwhelming amount of literature stated that school counselors' confidence levels determine their ability to manage bullying behaviors (Bradshaw et al., 2007; Bodenhorn, 2001; Stankiewicz, 2007). Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory supports the self-efficacy philosophy (Charlton, 2009). Bandura's SCT states that individuals' control their thoughts, motivation, and actions (Bandura, 1977a, 1986) based on their perception of whether they can or cannot perform a task. Larson and Daniels (1998) defined self-efficacy as "the degree to which individuals consider themselves capable of performing a particular activity" (p. 2). Self-efficacy is not a skill that one possesses; instead, it's an individual's judgment of performance skills and ability level needed to complete a task (Bandura, 1986). On average, individuals who lack efficacy avoid situations they are unable to manage or that seem threatening (Townsend, 2013).

Self-efficacy manifests itself in four sources (Bandura, 1997). The four sources of self-efficacy are mastery experiences (performance accomplishments), vicarious experiences (modeling), verbal persuasion and physiological/affective (emotional arousal) (Bandura, 1977a, 1977b; Claiborne, 2001). Efficacy develops through mastery experiences when an individual's skills with direct success are greater than his/her

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failures which are transferred to other situations (Bandura, 1977a, 1986; Novick & Isaacs, 2010). Charlton (2009) stated, "If a school counselor experiences success in addressing a bullying situation, the counselor will believe that he or she will be successful in addressing other bullying situations in the future" (p. 28). Conversely, Spaulding (2007) found "repeated failures will lower mastery expectations, especially if they occur early in the task progression" (p. 42).

About mastery experiences, if an individual has self-efficacy for current bullying problems, that person is likely to have it with future bullying situations. When counselors experience more success than failure with managing bullying incidents, they develop a preconceived notion that they will continue to be successful (Charlton, 2009). Thus, a counselor's current self-efficacy level can serve as a predictor of his future performance.

While vicarious experiences have less influence on self-efficacy than mastery experiences (Bandura, 1977b, 1986), each source plays a unique role in the development of confident school counselors. When counselors develop self-efficacy through vicarious experiences, they learn to handle a situation by observing another individual handling a similar situation (Bandura, 1986). When a person learns through vicarious experiences, he or she learns through the experiences of others. These experiences cause the individual to believe that his or her skills are equal to or similar to another individual's skills. Thirty-five years of research stated that one's vicarious experiences could influence his or her self-efficacy and performance (Harrison, 2004; Schunk & Hanson, 1985; Schunk, Hanson, & Cox, 1987; Zimmerman & Blotner, 1979). It is highly probable that a school counselor will develop the self-efficacy needed to manage bullying behaviors because if he or she has observed another individual successfully managing bullying behaviors.

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Verbal persuasion also influences self-efficacy. Although verbal persuasion has less of an effect on self-efficacy than mastery and vicarious experiences (Bandura, 1986), it has been known to aid in developing assertive counselors. Verbal persuasion occurs when an individual is coaxed into believing that he or she can accomplish a task that he or she otherwise may not have considered or may not have been able to perform (Charlton, 2009). When it is used positively, an influential individual act as a cheerleader to the counselor and gets him or her to use a new or different approach when confronted with bullying incidents. The drawback to verbal persuasion is that self-efficacy can easily be diminished if a counselor experiences failure while carrying out a task (Charlton, 2009). Benefits of verbal persuasion are often weak and temporary (Olivier & Shapiro, 1993).

The last state of self-efficacy is physiological/affective (emotional arousal). One's physiological/affective (emotional arousal) is defined as his or her physical and emotional reaction to a situation (Charlton, 2009). In general, the less anxiety that an individual experience while performing a task, the greater his or her success level with the task. When a person experiences stress during a task, he or she tends to avoid the task in the future (Spaulding, 2007) which then results in an efficacy deficit (Charlton, 2009). Avoidance leads to undeveloped skills (Bandura, 1977b). In the case of school counselors, they need to develop an optimistic sense of self-efficacy when managing bullying behaviors (Charlton, 2009), because a single traumatic experience could damage their professional careers.

The paradigm of anti-bullying programs has shifted towards school counselors being included in bullying policy discussions, leading anti-bullying programs, and

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managing bullying behaviors. The issue with school counselors leading anti-bullying programs is that many counselors are reluctant to accept this role because of their low level of self-efficacy. Based on past and current research regarding school counselors and their preparation and ability to manage bullying incidents involving students with disabilities, the majority of studies will continue to angle towards what affects the mainstream population. The bullying prevention and intervention articles in this literature review focus on school-wide bullying. While students with disabilities are provided individual rights and modifications by the federal government, these students are being given the same bullying prevention and intervention services as their nondisabled peers. Students with disabilities' needs are either minimized regarding bullying services, or they are grouped in and addressed along with the entire school. These practices disregard the needs of students with disabilities.

Several researchers have examined the effectiveness of anti-bullying programs. The results are somewhat controversial. A study conducted with 278 school counselors in Arkansas concluded that counselors perceive anti-bullying policies to be less effective in the disciplining students who bully than preventing bullying incidents (Barnes, 2010). Another possible negative consequence of bullying education programs is that schools may experience a spike in reported bullying incidents. These incidents may or may not have merit. With increased scrutiny and awareness, students, staff, and teachers may perceive bullying where previously it had gone unreported and unrecognized; this false positive could create the perception that the bullying problem in a school is worse than it is in schools (Smith, Schneider & Smith, 2004).

Self-Persuasion

Self-Persuasion is the act of convincing someone to do something that they otherwise would not have done. In the Bully (2011) documentary, students were routinely bullied on the bus and at school. The Bully documentary publicized the lived experiences of the students being bullied. This documentary uncovered bullying acts that forced dialogue among parents of students being bullied, communities, and community leaders. The emotional symbols of the bullying incidents persuaded parents and communities to stand together to address the bullying epidemic.

School counselors have more capacity to handle bullying than they realize. Counselors' daily routine and interactions with students are likely to foster indifferent, negative or positive relationships with students. This interaction naturally places counselors in a position of awareness of activities happening in the school. Awareness is likely to produce self-persuasion for counselors to become more proactive to bullying and ultimately lead to an increase in self-efficacy that they can make a difference in bullying of students with disabilities.

School Counselor Preparation

School counselors are expected to have knowledge of the population of students they serve. This knowledge includes, but is not limited to, the number of students in the school, the grade levels of the students, and the subgroups within the school. All public schools in the United States have grouped special education students into students with disabilities subgroup. Within this subgroup, students are categorized based on one or multiple areas of disabilities. Students with disabilities are identified from the list of the 13 areas of disabilities in IDEIA, 2004. Most school counselors are not familiar with

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students with disabilities, their characteristics, or their unique needs. Therefore, there is a concern of whether school counselors are sufficiently meeting the needs of students with disabilities and providing them with adequate services.

On average, school counselors do not receive the necessary preparation regarding special needs students in their program of studies (Adkison-Bradley et al., 2007). In fact, most educational institutions do not require that future school counselors take special education courses. Telephone conferences with relevant personnel in school counseling programs and an online inventory of four universities and one college (Capella University, Clemson University, South Carolina State University, University of South Carolina (USC), and The Citadel) revealed that two of five educational institutions require future school counselors to enroll in special education courses where they receive meaningful instruction on exceptional children's needs and their characteristics.

Capella University and Clemson University's school counseling programs have no mandate that students attend a special education class. However, Capella University requires its students to enroll in a diverse populations class (Capella University, 2014), and Clemson University requires its students to enroll in a multicultural class (Clemson University, 2014). Both courses are designed to help students examine their position on social justice and methods to prevent mental health issues of their future clients (Capella University, 2014). About exceptional children, these institutions fail to provide intense instruction regarding children with special needs. Students who attend their classes will receive some degree of knowledge about special needs students; however, their multi-component courses lack focus on instructional intensity and negatively impacts students' overall understanding of special education.

For the master's degree in Elementary and Secondary School Counseling at The Citadel, some special needs education is required. According to The Citadel's webpage, students' core curriculum includes EDUC 514 -The Exceptional Child in the School; the purpose of this course is to provide college students with an introduction to the learning and behavioral characteristics of students with disabilities. This institution's comprehensive curriculum also requires its students to enroll in a middle school course where they learn to analyze literature relating to effective schools (The Citadel, 2014). South Carolina State University does not include any special education classes in its specialized school counseling program. The institution does require students to enroll in three (3) elective courses. The courses are listed among a compiled list of thirty-eight (38) approved elective courses that students may self-select to fulfill curriculum requirements (South Carolina State University, 2014). There is no evidence that the university encourages students to enroll in special education classes opposed to other listed courses.

In contrast to the four educational institutions' counseling programs, the University of South Carolina's program offers more special education training to students studying school counseling. Students are required to enroll in EDCE 510 - Introduction to School Counseling, where they study special education and disability laws such as IDEA and 504. Students are also required to enroll in NPSY 757 - Psychopathology for Counselors, where they are taught specific diagnosis and characteristics of special education students. The USC requires students to take 6 -9 elective credits hours. EDEX 523 – Introduction to Exceptional Children is listed as one of the electives. As in the case with South Carolina State University, there is no evidence that the USC encourages

students to enroll in special education classes as elective courses opposed to other listed classes (University of South Carolina, 2014).

The investigation of the advanced degree programs in school counseling was done to gather and document the course of studies at four universities (Capella University, Clemson University, South Carolina State University, University of South Carolina) and one college (The Citadel) in South Carolina. This contribution can be expounded upon by comparing the course requirements for school counselors at these schools with other colleges and universities in and outside the state of South Carolina.

To date, little literature exists regarding the extent to which school counselors are trained to handle bullying. Even less research is available on school counselors' abilities to manage to bully students with disabilities. The literature that is available states that school counselors should address academics, careers, personal/social development and preventive programs such as bullying (Charlton, 2009). According to ASCA, school counselors should receive professional development on bullying, have professional association membership, and communicate with staff members, parents and guardians to select bullying interventions for students. Effective school counseling programs provide training for counselors in management activities (e.g., budget, facilities, policies, procedures and data analysis) (ASCA, 2005). Ideally, counselors would be included in any and all discussions and decisions about what funding will be used for specific bullying-intervention programs as well as when the programs will be implemented. They would delegate responsibilities to everyone involved and use data to address the needs of students (Charlton, 2009). Well-trained counselors use their skills to train staff and

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conduct pre and post assessments about the effectiveness of the program (Clarke &
Kiselica, 1997).

Although researchers have documented the need for school counselors to be
trained in bullying prevention, most counselors have not received formal preparation in
this area. In a study conducted by Allen, Burt et al. (2002) on 236 school counselors, 20%
of counselors stated they had participated in crisis-related training, 6.5% (with 16-20
years of experience) revealed they had no training and counselors with 1-5 years of
experience engaged in higher levels of training. Werner also conducted a study on school
counselors in Missouri. The results of the study revealed that 48% of counselors felt
moderately prepared to handle a school crisis as 68% of them had received professional
development on bullying interventions (Werner, 2007). An extension of Allen, Burt et al.
(2002) study revealed that 24% of school counselors felt adequately prepared to handle
crises; 57% stated that they felt minimally prepared while 18% reported they felt well
prepared to deal with crises. Jacobsen and Bauman (2007) suggested that most counselors
are unaware of information regarding appropriate and effective interventions that will
reduce bullying.

Special Education Teacher Preparation

Preparation for teachers on bullying prevention has gained momentum in the past
decade. Certified special education teachers have previously begun their higher education
training learning the basics with little preparation courses on proactive prevention that
often special education students encounter. Preparation courses in special education often
provided teachers with diverse training in communication, social and emotional
development, oral language development, social/behavior skills, motor skills, functional

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and independent living skills, employment-related skills, self-advocacy skills, orientation of mobility skills, and travel instruction (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2001). Educational institution requirements for students seeking certification in special education are similar. Teachers are required to learn information in a specific period and complete systemic assessments (Vernon-Dotson, Floyd, Dukes, & Darling, 2014). Still, little has been done traditionally on training teachers on preventive methods of bullying.

The U.S. Department of Education has hosted an annual Federal Partners in Bullying Prevention Summits since 2014. Consistently, exit surveys have confirmed that classroom teachers want to help stop bullying, but they do not have the requisite skills to do so. Training is limited and failed to check for reliability of the skills taught. Other trainings are cost prohibited or not based on current research. Therefore, the Department of Education and its Safe and Supportive Technical Assistance Center created training for classroom teachers on bullying. The two-part training is designed to support teachers in proactive and preventive bullying methods. The training is based on research and provides practical approaches for identifying and addressing bullying.

Specific to special education and bullying, other programs have been created to support special education teachers. As a result of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the school must address the harassment. As such, specialized training is required for teachers of children with disabilities. In 2013, ED's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) issued guidance to educators and stakeholders on bullying of students with disabilities. This guidance outlined the school districts' responsibilities to ensure that students with disabilities who are subject to bullying continue to receive free appropriate

public education (FAPE) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). While the law does not outline the training, it did create a need for action with regards to appropriate training. As such, a Google search led to more than a million sites.

Special education teachers have also found it necessary to keep their students safe, but there are also reasons to keep regular education students safe from students with disabilities. Research suggests that some children with disabilities may bully others as well (Mishna, 2003). As such, preparation for special education teachers must move beyond the walls of a bachelor's degree if they are to help students with disabilities. Like any continuous learning, special education teachers will need to read more, to take additional and specialized classes, attend conferences specific to bullying, and act to get more involved in helping all stakeholders (Mishna, 2003). The lives of all children, including students with disabilities, are at stake. Educators can no longer sit and wait. The time to act is now.

Educational Administration Preparation

School administrators hold the highest positions in schools. As the school leaders, they are charged with providing for the care, welfare, safety, and security (CPI) to all students in their building. Administrators who have a rudimentary understanding of students with disabilities and the issues they face are instinctually more likely to protect these students. Likewise, when administrators know federal laws, they are better equipped to protect students with disabilities. Many of the institutions that develop and offer degree programs and curricula for school administrators do not provide or mandate in-depth preparation on students with disabilities.

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Investigations using telephone conferences and internet research with one college and four universities (The Citadel, Capella University, Clemson University, South Carolina State University, and the University of South Carolina (Columbia) reveal that most administrator education programs do not require specific coursework in the area of students with disabilities. The Citadel mandates that students seeking an advanced degree in school administration enroll in a special education course. Students enrolled at The Citadel can earn a M.Ed. in Educational Leadership or a M.Ed. in Elementary or Secondary School Administration and Supervision. A prerequisite to all three programs the Citadel offers is that students enroll in *EDUC-514*: The Exceptional Child in the School as well as *EDUC-601:* School Law (The Citadel, 2014).

Capella University offers a M.Ed. and a Ph.D. Program in Leadership in Educational Administration. There are no classes specifically directed towards the special needs student population. Participants are required to enroll in *ED7823:* Education and the Law (Capella University, 2014).

Clemson University offers a M.Ed. in Administration and Supervision. Students in this program can pursue certification in Elementary Principal/Supervisor (K-8) or Secondary Principal/Supervisor (6-12). Requirements for both certifications are that students enroll in *EDL 7250*: School Law (Clemson University, 2014).

South Carolina State University offers a Master's and a Doctoral Program in Educational Administration. South Carolina State University prepares educators for careers in Elementary Level Administration and Secondary Level Administration. *EAM 738*: School and the Law is a requirement to complete any level of the program.

The University of South Carolina offers a M.Ed. and a Ph.D. program in Education Administration. The school requires students to take three semester hours in Exceptionalities - EDEX 523: Introduction to Exceptional Children or EDPY 705: Human Growth and Development course. Students choose one of the two courses.

Capella University, Clemson University, and South Carolina State University do not recommend or require that students seeking a degree in School Administration enroll in special education courses. The school law classes these programs offer are not specifically focused on students with disabilities; however, educators taking these classes will learn about some legal issues that impact students with disabilities, such as the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) and information on the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

One goal of an administrator education program of study is to adequately prepare administrators to identify and address the needs of all students. Although it is highly unlikely that prospective administrators would have no exposure to students with disabilities, it is possible that they have had very little exposure to this population of students. Not mandating that administrators take courses specifically addressing students with disabilities creates a blind spot when it comes to school leaders and their familiarity with the students they serve. Courses of this nature provide more insight into the federal laws as well as effect different educational models (inclusion, pull out, self-contained classes) have on the student. A lack of knowledge and exposure to these issues could marginalize the challenges students with disabilities face. It also increases the problems involved in creating programs to combat the bullying faced by students with disabilities. Students with disabilities and the stakeholders are left to rely on these professionals

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learning as they go along. Educational programs prepare administrators to face a variety

of ever-changing problems with multi-faceted solutions. Removing students with

disabilities from the preparation hamstrings administrators and makes protecting these

students more difficult.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The qualitative phenomenological study was conducted to explore how counselors, special education teachers and principals perceive the bullying of special education students and their preparedness to address the issue. Little is known about how counselors, special education teachers and principals perceive the bullying of students with disabilities in schools and their preparedness to function as effective policy actors for addressing the problem. Qualitative research methods are appropriate because the purpose of the study is to gain a deeper understanding of this specific phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The findings of this research may provide insights for educators and policy-makers to improve the preparation and policies and practices adopted to help counselors, special education teachers, and school leaders to address the bullying of students with disabilities. This chapter reviews the study's research design and methods.

School leaders continuously find themselves having to address bullying situations. School leaders are faced with the fact that the scenes in schools are changing, and while the literature on bullying is extensive, knowledge about strategies to prevent bullying are not always well understood by officials in schools (Rallis & Goldring, 2000). Further, building-level principals generally do not have consistent and cohesive preparation around students with disabilities (Henderson-Black, 2009).

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do counselors, special education teachers and principals perceive the bullying of students with disabilities in their schools?

2. How do school counselors, special education teachers and principals explain the bullying of students with disabilities and what do they think can be done about it?

3. Do counselors, special education teachers and principals believe that they have the necessary background, training, authority and knowledge of best practices to be effective policy actors regarding the bullying of students with disabilities?

Research Methodology

Qualitative methods were selected for the study because the focus is on the views and experiences of the participants. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) defined qualitative research as,

a multi method involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena regarding the meaning people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials – case study, personal experience, introspective, life study, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts. (p. 2).

These methods capture the voices of the participants, their meanings and individual human experiences (Yin, 2012). Qualitative approaches gather data from interviews to understand lived human experiences (Merriam, 2009) of both individuals and groups (Yin, 2012). The participants for the study included counselors, special education teachers and principals (Riessman, 2008). Qualitative research engages multiple perspectives in an in-depth fashion (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). Qualitative data were used to more fully describe an occurrence as the participants usually experience the phenomenon (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). The participants' experiences of the phenomenon fully emerged through the use of the qualitative method (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013).

Research Design

The phenomenological research design, as defined by Merriam (2009), is a type of qualitative research that "focuses on the experience itself and how experiencing something is transformed in consciousness" (p. 24). This study sought to understand how the participants' experiences related to safeguards for victims of students who were bullied in schools. Patton (2002) believed that "there are essences to shared experience. These essences were the core meanings mutually understood through a phenomenon commonly experienced. The experiences of different people were bracketed, analyzed, and compared to identify the essences of the phenomenon…" (p. 25). Therefore, this study depicted the essences of the basic structure of the experiences of nine educators with skills in middle schools that have experienced bullying.

A phenomenological design was suitable for investigating the lived experiences of counselors, special education teachers and principals (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher focused on studying multiple individuals and gathering data through interviews and

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document analysis to provide meaning attributed to the experiences (Clandinin, 2007).

Further, Moustakas (1994) used a heuristic process in phenomenological analyses that is

used for the analysis of data for this study.

Moustakas's (1994) process involved five steps: immersion, incubation,

illumination, explication and creative synthesis. The process of immersion included the

researcher's experiences in the study. Although the researcher was knowledgeable of

students with disabilities and bullying, that was not the case for this research. Moustakas

(1994) describes this research as a heuristic process in phenomenology in which

incubation includes "intuitive, awareness, insights, and understanding" (p. 19). The

findings of this study were designed to ensure incubation. The third process was

illumination. Illumination was considered an "active knowing process to expand the

understanding of the experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 19). The data were carefully

analyzed to ensure illumination. The next process was explication which refers to

reflective actions. The researcher used reflections based on the analysis to produce the

conclusions. Moustakas' (1994) final step was creative synthesis, "bringing together to

show the patterns and relationships" (p. 19). Utilizing Moustakas's heuristic process

aligned with Pereira's (2012) notion that thoroughness in phenomenological research

supported a rigorous process and led to a valid study that provided insight regarding

illumination of a phenomenon.

Population

The population from which the participants were selected came from the Olde

English Consortium in South Carolina. The Olde English Consortium (OEC) is an

educational non-profit collaborative designed to promote excellence in education. The

consortium started in 1976 serves the North Central region of South Carolina. Educators throughout out the nation considered this to be a diverse collaborative due to its work with special education programs, fine arts, library and media, physical education, languages, and guidance. The primary goal of the Olde English Consortium is to bring stakeholders together to improve education as a means of improving the quality of life for the people in the region.

At the time of this study in 2017, membership in the region was composed of nine school districts and two universities. Within the nine school districts, there were a total of 26 high schools, 33 middle schools, and 92 elementary schools. From the three middle schools, the participants were selected. These schools were chosen because they were in the same region, had students in the same socio-economic range, and had a similar mix of cultural and academic diversity.

The nine participants were educators from three middle schools that were randomly selected from the population of 33 middle schools in the Olde English Consortium. Participants in the study were three school counselors, three special education teachers and three building-level principals, one each from three middle schools in South Carolina.

<center>**Sources of Data**</center>

The sources of data used to explore this qualitative phenomenological study were the interviews, a post-interview survey, and relevant documents. Interviews were used to access the perceptions of counselors, special education teachers and principals regarding bullying of students with disabilities. Interviews were also used to examine their understandings of the causes of bullying. Document analysis and survey questions were

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used to collect data on the types of training of counselors, special education teachers and principals received related to the bullying of students with disabilities. The interviews sought to determine whether the participants felt that there was a problem, and if so, what was being done to address the problem. Further, interview data were gathered to understand the participants' knowledge level related to bullying in schools.

Document analysis was conducted to support and better understand the perceptions of the participants. Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing and evaluating documents (Merriam, 2009). Documents were examined in printed and electronic forms. Corbin and Strauss (2008) supported document analysis that required data be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge. The documents examined were: agendas on anti-bullying training, faculty meeting agendas, specified online websites, surveys, and lesson plans.

The third data source was a 10-item post survey. A post survey was conducted electronically to determine the perceptions of the participants and to determine if there was a change in consciousness since the interviews. The post survey was designed to gain additional information about bullying of students with disabilities, to determine if participants' level of efficacy had increased after the interview, and to see if they had taken any additional steps to protect students with disabilities from bullying.

Three data sources were used to triangulate the information in this study. Triangulation was used to support the perceptions and to use multiple methods to gain a better understanding of bullying of students with disabilities. The data sources provided

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clear methods for data collection and data analysis of bullying in three middle schools based on the perceptions of school counselors, special education teachers and principals.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection began only after approval was granted. Therefore, to negotiate entry into the setting, electronic mail (e-mail) was sent to the superintendents of schools to introduce the researcher, to explain the purpose of the research, and to enlist permission to research their districts. Once the superintendents granted permission, the school principals were contacted by e-mail to introduce the researcher, explain the purpose of the study and to elicit permission from them and their school counselors and special teachers to participate in the study. Once written permission was granted from the school principals, emails were sent to three counselors (one per school), three special education teachers (one per school), and three building-level principals (one per school) to introduce the researcher, to explain the purpose of the study, and to gain their participation. All individuals contacted were asked to reply to an email to accept or decline participation in the research within seven days. The data collection process began once the steps were completed and all approval granted and permissions signed.

The interviews were conducted with each participant in their natural setting. Documents were collected based on the comments and information gained from the interviews. The survey was administered to check for a change in practice during an eight weeks period. The three sources of data were used to triangulate further the information collected in this study. Once data were collected, transcription research analysis process analyzed and compiled interviews into narrative form and to align the documents and survey with the categorized interviews.

Interviews

  Interviews were conducted over a period of two weeks. Merriam (2009) suggested that "interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them. It is also necessary to interview when interested in past events, that are impossible to replicate" (p. 88). The interviews conducted for this study were designed to understand past behaviors that affect current practices and to explore behaviors through experiences. Merriam (2009) further suggested that interviewing is often the only method for collecting data. Interviewing was used for this study because it provided immediate access to data and allowed the researcher to hear the voices of those directly involved with the welfare of the students.

  After the approval was granted to conduct the study, it was important to establish relationships with the participants. The process of building a relationship with the participants in the study can be referred to as "negotiating entry" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 82). It can also be referred to as "gaining access" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, pp.75-80) to individuals being studied or the setting. The interview process begun after all permissions were granted and necessary protocol was followed for conduction research.

  To collect the data in an orderly manner, a step-by-step process was created and deemed necessary for data collection:

1. Data were collected from three counselors, three special education teachers and three principals. One participant from each group came from one of three schools.

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2. Each participant was given a pseudonym to identify his or her position and school. The Schools were labeled: Alpha Middle, Beta Middle, and Gamma Middle. Participants who attended Middle Alpha School were assigned pseudonyms that began with "A." The counselor was Adams, the teacher was Anderson, and the principal was Adcock. Participants who attended Beta Middle School became Counselor Baker, Teacher Bennett, and Principal Boswell. Participants who attended Gamma Middle School were identified as Counselor Crosby, the Teacher Charles, and Principal Cunningham.

3. Photocopies and backup recordings were made of all collected materials to ensure nothing was lost or accidentally erased.

4. Transcriptions were completed from the recordings, note-taking and electronic devices.

5. All information was entered electronically into a Microsoft Word or Excel file for greater maneuverability and organization. This process allowed organized data flexibility and the ability to use data in ways that made it easier to use. The electronic data were coded for processing.

Utilizing the five-step process allowed the researcher to collect the data in an orderly step-by-step process.

Document Analysis

Data collected in this study was also subjected to document analysis. Document analysis allowed the researcher to find, analyze, and interpret patterns in data (Schwandt, 2007). The document analysis approach employed in this study was semiotics. Semiotics considers the life of signs in society; and it seeks to understand the underlining messages

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in visual texts and forms a basis for interpretive analysis. Therefore, the findings in this study were reliable because the information was verifiable (Clarke, 2005).

The documents collected for this study varied were those available in all schools, such as the faculty handbook and discipline plan, and those identified by the participants during the interview process. The researcher identified documents from faculty meetings and professional development that were conducted on bullying. Further, documents specific to special education requirements as related to the treatment of students with disabilities were collected and analyzed for the study.

Post Survey

A post survey was conducted eight weeks after the initial interview to check for changes in the behavior of the principal, counselor and the special education teachers. This survey was designed to assess participants' level of training in students with disabilities, and the training they received to manage bullying incidents involving students with disabilities. The survey was created using SurveyMonkey®. The ten question survey used a five-point Likert scale. The ratings were *strongly agree, agree,* and *disagree.* SurveyMonkey® was used for the basic analysis necessary for this short survey.

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Data Analysis Procedures

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Conducting a qualitative phenomenological research study required the collected data to be analyzed using multiple steps to ensure credibility. Open coding was utilized to generate categories of information from interviews, documents, and survey. During the transcription process, participants' responses were categorized into common themes using coding (Maxwell, 2013), which were used to sort information by similarities or

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differences (Smith, 1979). The sorted data ultimately became a narrative that was used to determine school counselors and principals' training in students with disabilities, the counselors and special education teachers received to manage bullying incidents. Further, it was essential to examine counselors' and special education teachers' involvement in anti-bullying policy discussions and decisions in three rural middle schools in South Carolina.

The process of reviewing, checking, and color coding transcriptions from interviews, documents, and survey results included setting up a chart to display the raw data based on common themes. By viewing the information in a raw data matrix, the data were easier to compare and to locate themes to support findings and initial conclusions. The accuracy, dependability, and credibility of the data depended on the effective use of the instrument to ensure the integrity of the results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ethical Considerations

Protecting the rights of the participants was the utmost consideration granted in this study. Further, the concern for the participants was a means to provide credibility in the completed work. It was essential to build a relationship with the participants to establish trust from the beginning of the data collection process. Openness was created that also confirmed the option to be excluded from the study at any given time. Guidelines to ensure ethical considerations were followed for conducting this study. The instructions included but were not limited to risks associated with the data collection process as it related to the participants, protection from harm, signed agreements, and a means for withdrawal at any point.

Summary

Chapter 3 outlined the research methodology and design. This phenomenological research design allowed the voices and experiences of the participants to be heard. This qualitative method provided an in-depth description and understanding of the lived experiences of three school counselors, three special education teachers, and three building-level principals who work in three middle schools within the North Central region of South Carolina known as the "Olde English Consortium." The transcribed data are summarized in the Findings section in Chapter 4.

The structured approach used to guide this study was advantageous because it is fluid and allowed the researcher to change methods in response to emergent insights (Maxwell, 2013). Procedures were recorded in an outline and were adjusted accordingly. Approaches taken in this study included four components: (a) establishing a relationship with the participants; (b) selection of settings, participants, times and places of data collection; (c) data analysis strategies and techniques; and (d) methods for data collection (Maxwell, 2013) through interviews. Field notes were taken to describe the setting and the response from each participant. Additionally, each interview was recorded using an audio recorder. The interviews were designed to collect data that were used to determine school counselors and special education teachers' years of experience, their education levels and their involvement in their school's anti-bullying policy and bullying program. The interviews determined school counselors and principals' knowledge of students with disabilities and the training counselors, special education teachers, and principals received to manage bullying incidents involving students with disabilities in three rural schools in South Carolina.

CHAPTER 4. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Introduction

This qualitative, phenomenological study examined the lived experiences of nine participants to understand the bullying of students with disabilities and how schools deal with the issue. The findings presented gave voice to nine educators in three classifications, including three counselors, three teachers, and three principals. Chapter 4 first concisely reviews the design and context of the study before presenting the data and analysis of the perceptions of participants from three schools. The study addressed the following research questions:

1. How do counselors, special education teachers and principals perceive the bullying of students with disabilities in their schools?

2. How do school counselors, special education teachers and principals explain the bullying of students with disabilities and what do they think can be done about it?

3. Do counselors, special education teachers and principals believe that they have the necessary background, training, authority and knowledge of best practices to be effective policy actors regarding the bullying of students with disabilities?

This chapter presented the results from the analysis of these three data sources. The data sources were interviews, documents, and post-interview surveys. Nine in-depth

interviews with three counselors, three teachers, and three principals were conducted, and the data were analyzed from 13 universal interview questions and four occupation-specific questions for a total of 17 interview questions. School principals are instructional leaders and are responsible for monitoring systems and procedures and facilitating services for students with disabilities (Pazey & Cole, 2013). While school principals are responsible for promoting services for students with disabilities, the services often exclude a plan to protect students with disabilities from bullying. These principals typically have not assigned school counselors and special education teachers as leaders of anti-bullying programs. Counselors and special education teachers are often the best-equipped staff members to lead anti-bullying programs, but even they often lack the recommended preparation in bullying prevention.

The second data source came from documents. Another problem centered on literature that highlighted schools without a plan for staff to receive professional development to manage bullying incidents of students with disabilities (Maag & Katsiyannis, 2012), or that do not have preventions and interventions in place to protect students with disabilities from students who bully (Raskauskas & Modell, 2011). As such, documents from these three schools were examined to determine the level to which educators obtained knowledge and skills to prevent bullying.

The third data source was used to determine any change in the activity or perspective among the participants using a post survey. In general, school principals, counselors and teachers do not have systematic preparation in the area of students with disabilities. Students with disabilities are seldom a fundamental part of their preparation programs (Pazey & Cole, 2013). However, this study sought to see if a change occurred

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after the interview, which, it was hypothesized, might have increasingly sensitized the participants to a potential issue in their schools.

Among the considerations address in this qualitative phenomenological were:

1. the extent to which principals assign school counselors and special education teachers as team members of anti-bullying programs;

2. the preparation that counselors and special education teachers received to manage bullying incidents involving students with disabilities;

3. teachers', principals' and counselors' knowledge of students with disabilities; and

4. the levels of self-efficacy to promote positive change in policy and practice.

The data were organized into matrices and categorized to make the analysis more efficient and purposeful. The data were examined to identify patterns and variations among the responses from the participants. The triangulation process supported the development of codes, trends, and thematic categories (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009).

Researcher's Subjectivity and Positionality

The researcher's position about this study was that of an insider with an invested subjectivity. At the time of the study, the researcher was a special education coordinator for a public school district and had worked in this field for twenty-three years. Over time, the researcher saw changes in the treatment of children, particularly in relation to bullying. As such, the interests of the researcher were peaked to explore behaviors in a particular region of the state of South Carolina. The researcher constructed this research and was influenced by the connection to the school environment. The author took into account that knowledge presented in the study was self-constructed by the author's relationship to the world and was socially constructed based on the author's experience

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(Anderson, 2013). To ensure research validity and to reduce bias, the researcher used multiple methods to gather data.

Interviews were used to provide an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of special education teachers, school counselors and building-level principals with experienced of this phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The social connection and personal experiences of the researcher to this study may have influenced the type of questions asked by the researcher and the answers given by the responders. Having first-hand knowledge of the problem that existed at the researcher's schools was a precursor to the type questions to compose, and the information sought. Thus, the responses given during the interviews may have been influenced by the researcher's substantial role in the research process as she is personally involved in every step taken.

An attached approach may have influenced what information is produced (Anderson, 2013). An attached approach refers to how people were affected by the norms and beliefs of their cultures and society. This influence took a more personal meaning for the researcher. Because of this potential impact, interview questions were created based on information gathered from the literature review. To strengthen credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, responses from the interviews were recorded verbatim (Croden & Sanisbury, 2006). A phenomenological research methodology was used to separate the researcher from the setting being studied. As suggested by Glesne (2011), the researcher made a conscious effort to enter into the research with a mindset of honesty, curiosity, desire and readiness to interact in collaborative ways.

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Descriptive Data

The nine participants in this qualitative phenomenological study were three special education teachers, three counselors and three principals from three different middle schools (Table 4.1). The gender of the participants was distributed in this way: three (3) school counselors, one (1) male and two (2) females; three (3) special education teachers, all females; and three (3) building-level principals, one (1) female and two (2) males. A pseudonym was given to each participant with the letter to represent the job title and a number to represent the school. Participants at Alpha Middle School names began with an A. They were counselor Adams, teacher Anderson, and principal Adcock. Participants at Beta Middle School were counselor Baker, teacher Bennett, and principal Boswell. Participants at Gamma Middle School were counselor Crosby, teacher Charles, and principal Cunningham. All the participants were employed at a middle school.

Table 4.1

Participants Employment Status

#	Participants	Positions	Schools
1	Adams	Counselor	Alpha Middle
2	Baker	Counselor	Beta Middle
3	Crosby	Counselor	Gamma Middle
4	Anderson	Teacher	Alpha Middle
5	Bennett	Teacher	Beta Middle
6	Charles	Teacher	Gamma Middle
7	Adcock	Principal	Alpha Middle
8	Boswell	Principal	Beta Middle
9	Cunningham	Principal	Gamma Middle

Three middle schools were randomly selected from the population of middle schools in the "Olde English Consortium" located in the North Central region of South

Carolina. Individual interviews were conducted with each participant during a period that was conducive to their schedule.

The participants did not need to have advanced degrees. However, 100% of the participants had a Masters' degree or higher (Table 4.2). There were two teachers with Masters Degrees. Masters' plus 30 hours were held by one teacher, one counselor, and one principal. Two principals and one counselor held education specialist degrees (which typically includes certification for the superintendency). One counselor held a doctoral degree. The participants were selected members of the Olde English Consortium. Membership in the consortium is composed of nine school districts and two universities. There are 33 middle schools of which three schools were randomly selected for this study. These schools were chosen because they are in the same region, have students in the same socio-economic range, and they have a similar mix of cultural and academic diversity. The researcher was not familiar with the participants at the onset of the study.

Table 4.2

Participants Educational Levels

#	Participants	Masters	Masters Plus 30	Education Specialist	Doctorate
1	Adams				X
2	Baker		X		
3	Crosby			X	
4	Anderson	X			
5	Bennett	X			
6	Charles		X		
7	Adcock			X	
8	Boswell			X	
9	Cunningham		X		

Data Collection

The approach used for data collection was chosen to triangulate the data for credibility and confirmation. The data sources for collection were interviews, documents, and survey. The interviews process was the first step for data collection. The interview process was followed by the accumulation of multiple documents. The final step for data collection was the post survey.

Interviews

The interview process was conducted in three phases approach. First, the interviews were conducted over a three day period. Fortunately, the principals' approvals from each school were gained. Participants were contacted and recruited at the end of the 2016-17 school year. School data and emails were immediately sent to potential participants, and the selection process began. Within a week, the nine candidates for participation were identified and consent forms signed. It was essential to conduct the interviews as close as possible to each other for each participant to have at least eight weeks of consciousness from the first interview with regards to their practices for the prevention of bullying.

There were 17 interview questions. Questions 1-12 and 17 were asked of each participant. Items 13, 14, 15 and 16 were occupationally specific. The interviews were conducted at various sites based on what was private, comfortable and convenient with the least distractions. As such, locations varied with one in the media center, one at the district office, two in a principal's office, two in a counselor's office, two in school conference rooms, and one in the classroom.

Prior to the start of the interview, the researcher explained that the interview would be recorded to ensure the accuracy of the information and that the recording would not be shared for any reason. The interview began when the purpose of the interview and the confidentiality information were stated. This information was outlined in the IRB application process and Chapter 3 of this study. Next, the data collection sources were explained, as was the format of the interview. The participants were told that the interview could take from 30 to 45 minutes. They were further explained that the questions were designed to raise their consciousness of bullying in their schools, particularly as it related to students with disabilities. An explanation was provided to each participant about the initial semi-structured interviews and interview survey eight weeks later.

At the conclusion of each interview, the participants were again given contact information if they needed to contact the researcher at any time. They were allowed to add any additional information that they wanted to add to the interview responses, or if they had further questions. They were told that within two weeks they would be sent their transcribed interview questions and answers to check for accuracy and meaning of the response.

Documents Analysis

After the interview process was completed, the document collection process began. The documents collected for this study were identified before the study and discovered from the interviews. Documents were obtained based on material and websites that the participants identified during the interview. Document collections were from professional readings, faculty meetings, morning bulletins, professional

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development, training, conferences, and other sources that were named by one or two participants. The documents were collected to identify information that was gained on bullying or bullying prevention. The documents were sorted according to whether they addressed harassment and bullying specifically in relation to special education.

Post Survey

The purpose of the post survey was to make recommendations for future courses of action. The data collected from this post survey were collected electronically approximately eight weeks after the initial interview. The ten-question survey asked specific questions regarding the participants' knowledge and training of bullying incidents involving students with disabilities. The SurveyMonkey® survey asked questions of the counselors, special education teachers and principals who were involved in anti-bullying policy discussions and decisions examined in this study. The data were organized according to the interview questions, and then later aligned to the research questions for inclusion in the narrative discussion.

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Data Analysis and Results

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This qualitative phenomenological study was designed to collect and analyze data shared from the first-person point of view on the participants' awareness of bullying as it related to special education students. Themes identified during the analysis of data and the experiences of the participants in intentionality are discussed. Data analysis and results were crucial to the credibility of the findings and conclusions that were drawn from this study. Data analysis began when the data collection process had reached a point of data saturation (Creswell, 2009).

While the data were being collected, the process for data analysis was being set up to ensure the information was presented in a manner that allowed for in-depth and critical review. Merriam (2009) maintains in qualitative research that the awareness lies in the process, not the results. As such, the ultimate intent of this analysis of data is to acquire an extensive understanding of the initial perceptions of the participants and determine if a change was made in their actions as a result of the awareness of bullying during an eight-week period. In the end, the data triangulation developed themes (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009).

Kleiman's (2004) phenomenological data analysis provided processes for "coding, categorizing and making sense of essential meanings of the phenomenon" (p. 7). The process allowed the researcher to work through the wealth of descriptive data to allow "common themes and essences to emerge" (p. 7). Table 4.3 represents the Kleiman Phenomenology Guide to Data Analysis that was used as a guide to data collection. This process involved an extensive examination of the data, including reading and rereading of the data. Next, the integration of the categories and themes identifies similarities and differences that were coded and grouped. After the data were thoroughly reviewed and analyzed, they were used to elaborate the findings. Finally, the raw data were further examined to check the interpretations to substantiate the accuracy of the results.

Table 4.3

Kleiman Phenomenology Guide to Data Analysis

Steps	Components	Description
1	First Reading	Read the interview transcript in its entirety to get a global sense of the whole.
2	Second Reading	Read the interview transcript a second time – this time more slowly – to divide the data into meaningful sections or units.
3	Integration of Sections	Integrate those parts/groups that you have identified as having a similar focus or content and make sense of them. (coding, categorizing)
4	Imaginative Variation	Subject your integrated, important sections/units to free imaginative variation.
5	Finding possible and plausible explanations for findings	Elaborate on your findings – this includes descriptions of the essential meanings
6	Raw Data Matrix	Revisit the raw data descriptions to justify your interpretations of both the vital meanings and the general structure. You do have to prove that you can substantiate the accuracy of all your findings by reference to the raw data.

Qualitative data analysis includes critical examination, careful interpretation and synthesis of all data to discover patterns, themes and meaningful categories for the uncovering of a better understanding of a phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). Interpretation of the data involves making meaning and significance from the data. The transcription was read and comparison made by Rev.com. Rev.com is a website that uses people to transcribe documents using technology for quality, speed, and value (Rev, 2017). This technology platform is designed for transcriptionists and translators. The tool is used by researchers for higher accuracy of information and speed.

The researcher studied the themes and the corresponding codes to determine the overarching themes providing insight on bullying as it relates to special education students. Narratives were interpretive; therefore, validation was the process of making

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claims for the trustworthiness of the researchers' interpretations as cited by (Mishler, 1990). Figure 4.2 depicts a summary of the data analysis process.

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                    ┌─────────────────────┐
                    │ Conduct the Interviews │
                    └─────────────────────┘
                      /                 \
        ┌──────────────────┐      ┌──────────────────┐
        │ Record responses │      │ Take anecdotal notes │
        └──────────────────┘      └──────────────────┘
                      \                 /
                ┌──────────────────────────┐
                │ Transcribe audio responses │
                └──────────────────────────┘
                      /                 \
    ┌──────────────────────────┐   ┌──────────────────────┐
    │ Read transcriptions and  │   │ Read transcriptions   │
    │ highlight reoccurrences  │   │ from Rev.com          │
    └──────────────────────────┘   └──────────────────────┘
                      \                 /
                ┌──────────────────────────┐
                │ Compare highlighted        │
                │ reoccurrences and Rev.com  │
                └──────────────────────────┘
                            |
                ┌──────────────────────────┐
                │ Seven themes emerged       │
                └──────────────────────────┘
```
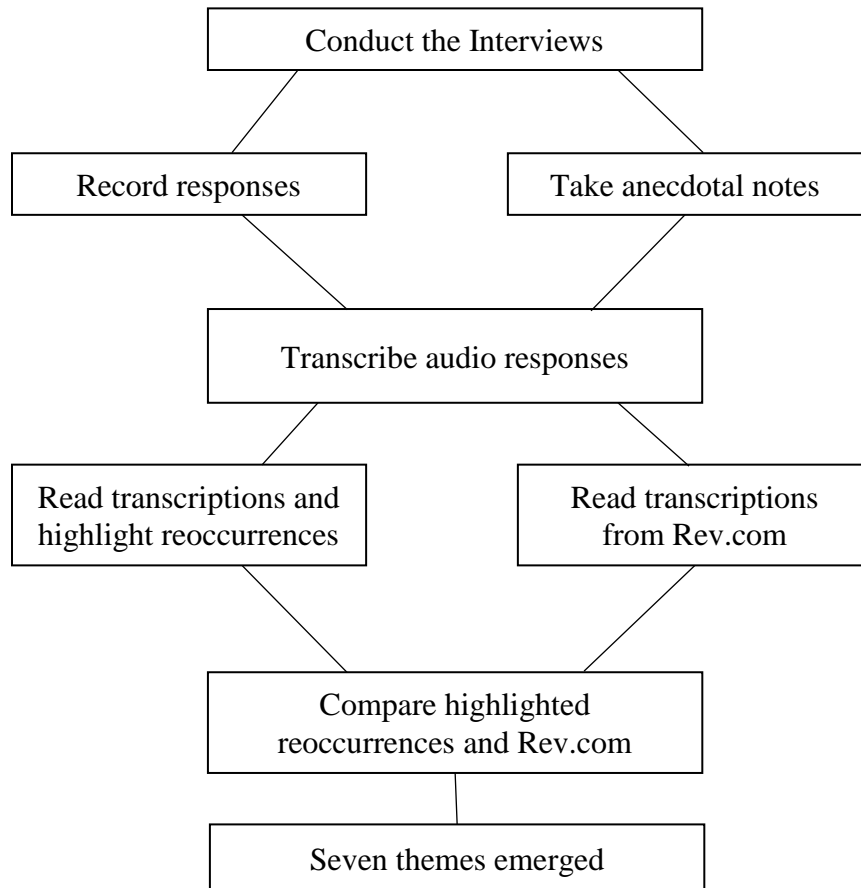
Figure 4.2: Summary of Data Analysis Procedures

Themes were gathered from the participants' interviews and the researcher's observations (while crosschecking with notes taken during the interview) evolving from the data that guided the data analysis. Nineteen themes were developed from a total of 17 interview questions. Each had subthemes that emerged from the interviews, documents and post survey. Table 4.4 represents the raw data matrix of themes and sub-themes.

Table 4.4

Raw Data Matrix

IQ	Themes	Sub-themes	*Data Sources		
			I	D	SI
1.	Social Media Bullying Intervention	Social/CyberMedia, Covertly, Sexual Orientation, Verbal, Late Problems, Cyber Bullying, Rare Occurrence, Name Calling, Small Community, Not Repeated, Take Up for Each Other, Relational Bullying	X	X	
2.	Referrals	Counselor Referral, Follow-up, Administrator Referral Investigate, Define Bullying, Listen, Teach/Model, Open Door Policy, Zero Tolerance, Discipline, Punishment Interventions, Second Chance, Small groups, Book Study, Empathy, Group Sessions, Coping Skills, Parent Contact,	X		X
3.	Punishments Preventions Bullying	School Districts, Zero Tolerance, Be Firm, Signed Agreement, Discipline & Punishment, Administration, Counselors, Understanding Bullying, Sharing Information, Collaborate, Bullying Prevention, Training, Classroom Guidance, Individual & Group Sessions, Self-Reporting, Staff Awareness, Coping Skills, Consequences, Program Bullying,	X	X	X
4.	Education	Swift & Severe Punishment, Teach Expectations, Involve Parents, Get to Know Students, Detect Problems Early, Staff & Students, Recognize Bullying, Zero Tolerance, Bystanders, Coping, Reason for Bullying, School Resource Officer, Principals, Counselors, Social Worker, Students, Roundtable Discussions,	X	X	
5.	Victim	Victim Personalities, SWD, No Particular Groups, Low Income, Quiet Students, Loner, Sexual Orientation, Low Self-Esteem, SWD Bully, Weaker Student, Student Demographics, Students Who Look Differently, Nerd, Slower Students	X		
6.	Bullying	Not Aware, Less Likely, Embrace SWD, No Issues Family, Students Grew-up Together, Define Bullying, Mainstream All SWD, One-Two Bullying Incidents, No Special Treatment for SWD, Fair, Equal	X	X	X

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		Sub-themes	*Data Sources		
			I	D	SI
7.	Coping Mechanisms	Weaker, Physical Disability, Equal Chance, Survival Skills, Aggressors, Different, Gain Power, Weaker, Looks	X		
8.	Communicate Assessments	All Staff, Oblivious, Intellectually Limited, Recognize & Pay Attention, Advocate, Parents, Training, Teachers, Counselors, Administrators, Therapist, Assessment, Social Worker, Teach Communication Skills, Coping Skills, Different Concepts, Personal Examples, Different Learners, DSS, Know Students, Relationships, No Knowledge of Characteristics Aware	X		X
9.	Intervention	Yes, Be Visible, Revisit Often, Gather Information, Educate, Safe Haven, Protect Students, Encourage Informers, Support Students, Mainstream Students, Encourage Empathy, Provide Interventions, Bullying Literature, Informal Discussions, Bullying, Character Education, Address Bullying	X	X	X
10.	Empathy Caring	Victim & Bully Conference, Punishment, Follow-up w/Victim, Encourage Self Reporting, Caring, Empathy, Individual Sessions, Support, Coping Skills, Report Staff, Counseling, Anonymous Reporters, Build Confidence, No Victim Support System, Warning & Punishment	X		
11.	Delegation Responsibility	Administrator's Responsibility, Counselors, Assist w/Discipline, Discuss, Teach Strategies, Involve Everyone, Students Victims, Bystanders, Teachers	X		X
12.	Awareness	Orientation, Visibility, Change Culture, Guidance, Know Students, Parenting, Good Behavior, Bullying Behaviors, Reality TV Shows, Support, Be Visible, Zero Tolerance, Encourage Self Reporting, Awareness, Educate, Empathy, Book Studies, Videos, Discussions, Open Dialogue, Relationships, Advocate, Victims, Bystanders, Aggressors, Bullying, Celebrities, US President, Monitor Social Media, Monitor Internet, Set Parameters	X	X	X

*Data sources: I = Interviews; D = Documents; S = Survey

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Seventeen themes were further examined, documents reread and further reviewed to reduce the themes to a manageable number, while ensuring the voices of the respondents were not lost. The themes were then collected into larger, coherent "umbrella" themes, then reduced from 17 to seven themes. The themes were further checked to ensure the alignment to the four interview questions. Sub-themes were also provided to maintain the integrity of the information. Table 4.5 represents the final alignment that will be used to present the findings. Qualitative research questions are exploratory and written according to the type study. Research questions for a phenomenological study are written to determine the lived experiences of participants regarding a specific phenomenon. Therefore, the research questions are layered to build on the richness of the lived experiences.

Presentation of the Findings

The findings of this study were presented based on the seven major themes that emerged from the analysis of data collected at three middle schools throughout South Carolina. Nine interviews were conducted with three principals, three special education teachers, and three counselors. The accuracy of the information was protected by using an interview protocol process. The findings emerged from the perceptions of participants' responses from 17 interview questions that provided information and opportunities for document collections and formation of post interview questions for online interviews.

Data were collected and analyzed to present the findings. The data collected were conducted using three approaches to triangulate the data in this phenomenology study: interviews, document analysis, and post survey. The three forms of data were organized, analyzed, and examined to extract themes. The seven themes that emerged

from the data are associated with the four research questions and included in the

discussion of the findings (Table 4.5).

The primary themes are bullying, interventions, social media, education,

behaviors, preparedness, responsibility, and skills. Research Question 1 had three themes:

bullying, interventions, and social media. Research Question 2 had two themes: education

and behaviors. Research Question 3 had one theme: preparedness. Multiple sub-themes

were shared with several research questions.

Table 4.5

Research Questions and Themes

Research Questions	Themes
1. How do counselors, special education teachers and principals perceive the bullying of students with disabilities in their schools?	• Bullying • Interventions • Social Media/ Cyberbullying
2. How do school counselors, special education teachers and principals explain the bullying of students with disabilities and what do they think can be done about it?	• Professional Training – Bullying • Behaviors
3. Do counselors, special education teachers and principals feel that they have the necessary background, training, responsibility, and knowledge of best practices to be effective policy-actors regarding the bullying of students with disabilities?	• Preparedness • Responsibility

Research Question 1

How do counselors, special education teachers and principals perceive the bullying

of students with disabilities in their schools?

This study used Olweus's definition of bullying to encompass bullying,

cyberbullying and the use of social media. He defined bullying as any repeated negative

behavior on the part of one or more individuals with the intent to harm that includes a

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factual or perceived power imbalance (Olweus, 1993). The definition of bullying that guided the federal government's efforts to stop bullying also informed the study. Some of the participants understandings of what constitutes bullying did not always align with scholarship or the federal conception, which are...” Then tell us which themes are bullying, interventions, and social media/ cyberbullying. The counselors, special education teachers, and principals perceived social media as a significant means of bullying in their schools.

Theme 1: Bullying

Bullying appears to happen at all schools in this study. However, do their perceptions of bullying, align with the definitions used by scholars or policy-makers? Several responses seemed to imply that the victims were at least partially at fault because of their inability to handle a personal situation. The participants also attributed the infrequency of bullying to their effective school policies. The participants were asked to discuss the nature of bullying at their schools. Bullying was woven throughout the responses to each question. At each of the schools in this study, the participants insisted that there was little tolerance for bullying.

Victim Blaming. During the interviews, a pattern emerged in which the participants first suggested that there were few to no acts of bullying--*it happens, but not really—*to acknowledgment--yes, it happens. For example, one participant from Gamma Middle School said, “…bullying at our school is different because we have all the different behaviors. For our students bullying is more of a joke. We don't see as much of the bullying because they all have about the same personalities. But we do try to prevent it. While the actual phase *blame the victim* was not uttered during the interview process,

some of the conversations elicited responses in which victim blaming was implied. Student playing the dozen is a good example. Principal Boswell shared about playing the dozen,

> Sometimes it starts with two kids talking junk and playing the dozen. A student may get tire or want to fight because he/she does not have the best jokes. The person who is winning then blames the fight on the person who wanted to stop because no longer is the game consensual.

Victim blaming is when the victim is blamed for the incident rather than the offender (George, & Martinez, 2002). Counselor Adams at Alpha Middle School stated that, "Typically, the kids who don't handle some personal situations well will get picked on or bullied. But we have a zero tolerance for bullying here. We attack it very strongly, head on and immediately."

Play fighting. Another question that emerged was on *play fighting* that stemmed from actions in the community. Counselor Baker, a counselor at Beta Middle School added,

> Bullying at my school is not significant here. Our kids know each other because it's such a small community. They all have grown up together, and they started school together. You see back and forth arguing or hitting them, and one person seems always to get the upper hand. But the next day or next hours, they are friends again. They pretty much know each other, so we don't see a lot of what they are doing as bullying. There may be times we have to address play fighting, and one person is annoyed, but that is just a part of the community.

Counselor Crosby, a counselor at Gamma Middle School, although at a different school than Baker, expressed similar sentiments: "The general teasing, not a lot of physical bullying, happens since I've been here." Teacher Charles, a special education teacher at the same school as Crosby cited an example of students speaking up on others' behalf,

> Well, as far as the nature of bullying in our school, since I've been here it's been rare. I haven't seen any. There have been maybe one or two occasions where some students have approached me to let me know that something has happened that caused a red flag or concern for what would be called bullying.

Teacher Bennett, a special education teacher, concurred with counselor Baker, the counselor at her school. She felt that bullying was minimal. She stated, "I believe that bullying does exist at the school but it is very rare." Principal Boswell, principal at Beta Middle School, concurred. He stated, "Bullying comes in different forms. It's something that normally is done covertly, and often adults don't even see it being done because it's not done openly." Counselor Baker mentioned what appeared to be a minimal display of bullying that could also be a passive approach to bullying that obliges the student to come forward and speak up. She said, "I believe that bullying does exist at the school but I just don't think that the students that are being bullied have a say or they're not coming forward. I don't think the bullied student is coming forth to tell anyone." ,

Principal Boswell mentioned bullying as a form of exclusion in that students in his middle school have shown some behaviors that are atypical. Boswell stated:

> I would say bullying has taken on a new form in my opinion, in middle schools especially, in its exclusivity. Basically, what it is that if I have a group of friends and I don't like you, then I make my friends not like you. What you feel is isolated

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and alone. Are they doing anything to you directly? No. Are they saying anything to you directly? No, but it's almost like the students don't exist?

A different perspective was share by principal Cunningham, principal of Gamma Middle School, in what is often referred to as *playing the dozen* (a form of bullying):

> I would say bullying at our school is different because we have all the different behaviors and the bullying behaviors are common. So for our students bullying is more of a joke. It becomes more of a game, a comedy hour of them going back and forth with each other. We don't see as much of the bullying because they all have about the same personalities of bullying each other. But we do try to prevent it before it escalates because most of our students have aggressive behaviors!

One could wonder if the joking is behavior accepted by the staff s, it's not taken as seriously because they believe that the students all tend to have aggressive behaviors. Additionally, this example seems to be among equals—a misunderstanding of the sense that bullying is between those unequal in power. Or is the mere definition of bullying, as it relates to name-calling, enough to consider the actions of the student at Gamma Middle School bullying? Bullying speaks to the intent to harm that includes an actual or perceived power imbalance (Olweus, 1993), which may suggest that such perceived joking may or may not be considered bullying.

Theme 2: Interventions

Multiple types of interventions were addressed when the participants were asked about what was being done about bullying. The responses included administrator referrals, parent conferences, counselor referrals, group sessions, listening, peer mediation, verbal warnings, discipline, zero tolerance, and investigations.

The counselors used different approaches to address incidences of bullying, a finding that may be explained in part by differences in local professional development since their professional training was similar. The demographic information that was gathered showed that similar training had been provided within counseling programs. The counselors' responses varied with respect to their handling of bullying incidences in their schools. The districts' own professional development may have contributed to that variation. Thus, the counselors in this study applied different methods to handling the situations.

At Alpha Middle School, counselor Adams had a process for handling bullying that was based on:

> the nature of it and the seriousness of the problem. For bullying or any other problem that seems to be low risk to the safety of the students, they are sent for guidance. When the problem is severe, the discipline administrator addresses the problem. However, for the situation that needs multiple interventions, both guidance and school administrators usually attack those issues in tandem. We call the bully in, confront him or her with their actions, and typically there's the discipline that follows because we do have a zero tolerance for bullying.

Counselor Adams then addressed how he collected the evidence to determine the course of action. Interestingly, the student's level of remorse was a determinant to the type of punishment, although this fact is not mentioned in the school discipline handbooks. Principal Adams further stated,

> The students are disciplined. Sometimes that is a judgment call depending on the level of remorse they show or don't show. What happens in all situations is that

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we follow up with the student who reported the problem and the person who was bullied just to make sure that there is nothing else occurring. Yeah, we follow up with the students and also let the teachers, staff or parent who reported the problem know if something has happened. We update them as much as possible on the situation so that this child is not left alone or in a pretty bad situation to let that happen again.

The counselor at Beta Middle School discussed teaming with the administration when addressing bullying. Counselor Baker shared more of a team approach with the administrators at her school. She addressed how they used in-school suspension (ISS) and out-of-school suspension (OSS) in handling extreme cases: "When we have bullying situations, the assistant principal usually handled those problems. After his investigation, he'll notify me, and then I'll make some conflict resolution with the students. If it's something very severe, they probably get ISS or OSS." Counselor Baker also shared how she listens for details of the situation in an effort to find points to use during mediation with the student. The goal is to get the student to take responsibility for his/her action:

> I'll have them walk me through what happened. I'll listen to them, and I tell them that you know, this is a safe place. Of course, we don't want you to be bullied. I take care of the problem and let them know that I am here. I have an open door policy for them.

She also conducts a lot of conferences to understand what is behind any appearances of bullying or other misbehaviors.

Counselor Crosby shared that all counselors are required to conduct classroom guidance based on South Carolina's State comprehensive program model. At the middle

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school, guidance focused on the rapidly changing needs of young adolescents. The comprehensive guidance program organized the work of counselors into activities and services. Crosby stated that bullying was one of the big topics addressed during classroom guidance. He shared that,

> Teachers, classroom teachers are our advocates for students who are being bullied for the most part, because they are the ones who tend to witness it and most of the time, they're the ones who report it. When students are identified as being bullied, we develop some support system for them. It is a personalized intervention. That support system will consist of periodic meetings, and during those sessions, we teach the kids how to develop coping skills.

Teachers Anderson and Charles shared how they use counselors if and when they see instances of bullying. Teacher Anderson mentioned, "When it's identified or detected, those (the student who is doing the bullying) students end up going for guidance." Teacher Charles stated, "Well, they (the administration) typically want us to refer it to the school counselor." However, she went on to share how she collects additional information before sending them to guidance:

> …but, what I tend to do, I like to be hands on. I like to make sure that I get as much information as I possibly can from the student in a manner where they feel comfortable with being able to identify what specifically happened, as far as getting details from them.

Teacher Charles then shared proactive team communication method that she uses after she gathers information, "I try to follow through with making sure that I do contact the school counselor and me also follow-up with the other team members, the other

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school teachers to help identify the nature of the problem." She stated that her goal was to find a way to remediate in that area to help the student so that it does not continue to happen. Another proactive team communication was shared by counselor Crosby. Crosby discussed how counselors shared strategies at district and state workshops that they have used within their schools for students who have been bullied or examples to eradicate cyberbullying.

Not all teachers were sure of how to handle reports of bullying. Teacher Bennett did not mention going to the counselor. She stated that she honestly did not know what to do in the event of students bullying. She responded,

> I don't know. If a student was to come to me and say, this person is messing with me, they use the word messing instead of the bully, then I would go in for the details to ask how is the student messing with you? Then we'll get those students myself, to see what's going on before I even involve an administrator or a counselor.

Teacher Anderson and teacher Charles shared how they are systematically studying bullying. At the beginning of the school year some measures are proactively put in place. Teacher Anderson discussed activities based on the entire district. She shared that,

> At the beginning of the school year, we used different scenarios with the students about disagreement. We've done a very detailed thing across the district. I mean we've done some studies as a whole district. The kids were involved with the book that we read. Then, we all go over the different policies for bullying, and they sign a statement saying that they understand the repercussions of bullying.

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Teacher Charles stated,

I usually have a discussion with my kids, where they are informed about what

bullying is, what it looks like and what to do if they either see it take place in the

hall or classroom or on the school bus so that they are aware of what to do.

Students could be either the victim or they could see it happening. So, what I tell

my students, how to prevent bullying, if they see it, let them be the voice to try to

help in the situation.

Teacher Anderson also addressed peer mediation as a means of intervention:

Peer mediation programs are in each of the schools for conflict resolution. The

program is used to empower students with necessary skills in different areas of

life. Students learn a lot in the classroom that helps them later in life. Their peer

mediator takes a group of kids that are pretty much good kids that try to create a

positive atmosphere. The program is designed for those students to actually help

other students solve their problems. The peer mediation program at this school

has adult supervision.

Each principal discussed their method of investigation. Principal Adcock shared

that when bullying is identified or detected in school, they investigate the situation. He

shared that,

When there's an issue, no child can say they haven't been spoken to by the

administration. It's documented - normally, with a date and document of the

purpose or nature of the incident. That's all 530 plus kids. First offense is

normally warned verbally, depending on the nature and severity of the incident or

what is detected. The bullies are punished, disciplined. This is a district initiative in the discipline handbook.

He further discussed the contact with the parent(s) and its importance to the process of bully prevention.

Principal Boswell shared that how he handles that situation is dependent upon how the harassment is detected and not every case that's called bullying is always bullying. He described what he meant in his statement about bullying not always being intimidating. This school's population is predominately African American. Culturally, according to the Urban Dictionary (2017), playing the dozens is an African American custom in which there is a head to head competition of comedic *trash talk* between two groups. They take turns "cracking on" or insulting one another until one of them has no comeback. They usually start by talking about the other person's "mama" and move on to other trash talking. The dozens can be a harmless game, or, if tempers flare, a prelude to physical violence. Principal Boswell shared about playing the dozen,

> Sometimes it starts with two kids talking junk and playing the dozen. You know the mama jokes. The kid tires of playing that game and the other kid continues to talk trash. Then kids will say, well he's bullying me. You know to a certain extent then that is true, but when you research it, the person is not entirely a victim, because they certainly were a participant.

Principal Boswell did not see the dozens as an actual bullying situation, and acknowledges that when playing the dozens the situation can go from consensual to non-consensual. He shared what he thought were real cases of bullying.

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I find that other kids become the voice for the victims when real bullying happens at my school. I have had a situation where a student was making another student bring games for his X- Box with the pretense of borrowing them overnight. The next day when he attempts to ask for the game, the bully would tell him he gave him the game and he better not ask for it again. Another student usually comes to me or another administrator and let us know what is happening. When we bring both into the office, the bully will say he only borrowed the games and did not remember to bring it back. The victim will be so scared that he will agree that he probably forgot. Or I have also seen a bully look at me and the victim and say that he was not supposed to bring the game back until next week. In that case, the victim also acknowledged that he had forgotten the day, but that was right. He wasn't supposed to bring the game back until next week. I usually bring in both parents for a conference.

Principal Cunningham discussed how she investigated that situation by talking to the students and the teachers. She added, "A lot of this stuff we see because we are in a smaller environment, we can monitor it through the social media and other children. Further, a lot of the kids they just show it to you. This is what's going on." They involve the parents and the school resource officer. A social worker is also an integral person in the intervention process. They are all key policy actors.

Principal Cunningham shared,

We discuss it with the social worker. Then the social worker and I decide whether we need to bring the victim in. We'll bring the victim in by themselves and say we've talked to the student and we'll see if their comfortable with talking to their

aggressor, with the person who is aggressing them. Most of the time they do share what happened. They want to hash it out. Then once we get in there and we talk about it, then it's over with.

Interventions were used in a variety of ways among the nine participants. There was little consistency of support for the victims and addressing the bullying from school to school. In fact, it seemed that the participants from the three middle schools did not make a distinction between conflict and bullying. Conflict is a normal day to day occurrence, whereas, bullying is an abusive behavior. Further, the victim's rights were not addressed as it related to bullying. The participants discussed consequences and actions for the bully, but little was noted about the victim. The victim is the person who has been directly harmed, yet very little was discussed on how the counselors, teachers or principals supported the victim.

Theme 3: Social Media/Cyberbullying

Multiple forms of social media were cited as sources of bullying in schools. Cyberbullying occurs when someone sends or posts harmful, false, or damaging messages about someone else. Cyberbullying has taken place over digital devices such as cell phones, computers, and tablets (Didden, Scholte, Korzilius, deMoor, Vermeulen, O'Reilly, & Lancioni, 2009). Utilizing digital devices, cyberbullying happens through SMS, text, and apps, or online in social media. The most common places where cyberbullying occurred at the time are Facebook, Instagram, Snap chat, and Twitter, although social media platforms continue to shift rapidly.

Students are suffering due to humiliation, unwarranted rumors, and multiple forms of electronic harassment. Counselor Adams stated, "We don't have a whole lot of

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issues with bullying here, but when we do, it's usually centered on social media." Teacher Anderson concurred and provided examples to support the position:

> I think our biggest issue that has occurred lately is through social media. Students and their phones and what they do outside of school and messages that they send has been the biggest concern that we've seen of lately. Students post messages that are harmful. Then, it ends up coming to school. Now, you have this fight going on, and teachers are like, "Where did this come from?" I would say that's the biggest bullying issue we have at our school has come up recently.

Principal Adcock, principal of Alpha Middle School, was even more specific regarding the types of social media that have been used in his school. He stated, "Most recently the core of bullying or problems between students is regarding social media on all platforms. Facebook, Snap chat, Instagram, Ick and even, I think it's called Text Now or something, another platform."

Utilizing social media presented some bullying problems and presented conflicts among students. Counselor Adams shared an example of an actual situation in her school that started as a result of social media:

> A young lady came to me and another student had text messaged her through some form of social media and said that she was going to fight her today. This is really an ongoing thing with these two. So I bought the other girl in and showed her the text message. Then I called her mom. Of course, she will be disciplined.

In this case the student came to the counselor as soon as she saw the text message, which allowed for a cool down period that often does not happen with social media. More importantly, the student coming to the counselor as soon as she saw the message allowed

the counselor to intervene during the early stage of conflict in order to dig deeper into the cause of the problem. Further, the counselor implied that the student would be disciplined. It was not clear if she was referencing the school or the home. . However, Counselor Adams expressed that the school would discipline the student for the inappropriate behavior using social media and any form of cyberbullying. She also mentioned the difficult with tracking the root cause or instigator with students using so many forms of media:

> But when we have kids like that who constantly go back and forth on social media, it's kind of hard to tell (the specific social media that is being used). Now tomorrow, she might be in here showing me what the other one sent, so that's the nature, excuse me, of middle school, that's just middle school students. We have had kids, boyfriends, and girlfriends when they break up, one talks about the other one. Notably, in today's age of social media, everyone is taking pictures and sending them to others to harass them. In another situation, a boy sent Instagram messages talking about a girl. It caused a lot of embarrassment with her friends, saying that she had done all these things which were not true. So, we had to get parents involved on that one.

One form of bullying happened between a boy and girl. It was difficult to determine based on the information provided if it was sexual in nature, bullying, or just inappropriate conduct. They seemed to discuss social media and conflict in general, but none of them seem to have a strong analytical sense of bullying, which is a distinct phenomenon that required distinct responses. The same situation could apply to venting and trash talking as it relates to cyberbullying on social media.

Principal Adcock regarded cyberbullying among all students via social media as a change in the times. He stated,

> I think bullying is always changing with the types of methods and modes. When we were in school it was probably verbal and written notes, and now its social media or groups, or group chats. Not an individual chat, but group chat where multiple kids can be in a community setting like a blog, sharing comments back and forth. Then, when it gets hot and heavy they back out, or they sign out of the group chat. However, the damage has been done when they decide to harass or verbally abuse someone in those chat rooms. The worse cases are when we actually have parents get involved in the negative discourse.

Principal Adcock revealed that parents sometimes get involved in their children's conflicts, particularly when it starts in the community. Counselor Crosby emphasized the cyberbullying in his school. He stated,

> The general teasing, not a lot of physical bullying, happens since I've been here. You come across it from time to time, but for the most part, it is either cyberbullying, which, of course, as you know are people talking about another person online via internet, or just straight-up verbal bullying. Every once in a while, you have complaints about physical bullying, but most of it is verbal and cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying can be harmful to all the parties involved. That was not discussed as it related to the person creating the negative messages. Those doing the cyberbullying or participating in it can experience personal repercussions. Schools are attempting to address cyberbullying, but because it is difficult to monitor and continue to change, the

problem can get worse. Because school stakeholders and parents may not witness cyberbullying, it is harder to recognize. Social media used at these schools may not be acknowledged because it continued to take on new roles. At one school, the three participants claimed that social media was not a severe problem because the school had a zero-tolerance policy for use. This could still be a problem that simply did not escalate at school. The connection was not made as to how having this policy in place prohibits students from abusing social media.

It should be noted that the responses the participants provided during the interviews that aligned with Research Question 1 were their self-reported perceptions of the bullying of students with disabilities at their respective middle schools. The fact that it may have been awkward for the participants to admit that bullying rate may have been higher when they were responsible for ensuring all students were in a healthy, safe and supportive environment must be kept in mind.

Research Question 2

How do school counselors, special education teachers and principals explain the bullying of students with disabilities and what do they think can be done about it?

Research Question 2 generated two themes regarding the cause of bullying and what can be done about it. According to the literature reviewed, understanding how and why a bully uses aggressive behavior is key to knowing how to handle the situation. Most aggressors bully because they do not understand how wrong their behavior is and how it makes the person being bullied feel (Stomp Out Bullying, 2017). The participants in this study addressed their understanding of bullying behaviors.

Theme 1: Professional Training – Bullying

Documents were gathered and reviewed to determine what preparations, policies and procedures are in place for students with disabilities who are bullied. The responses all centered on professional development as it relates to learning strategies for bullying prevention. Principals have shared articles that discussed factors that tend to increase the risk of bullying; professional development and book studies were the most frequent practices. Information from the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) on bullying was presented in special education teachers' manuals at each school. The OSERS was committed to working with States to ensure that schools provided all children with a safe and nurturing school environment in which they can learn.

Materials were collected at each school to determine whether staff have access to resources about bullying: there were clear efforts to ensure that teachers are knowledgeable about bullying prevention at the three school sites. There was evidence of School-level Professional Development (Safe Schools Training), Off Campus Professional Development, Staff and Student School wide Book Study using *On My Honor* by Marion Dane Bauer, Book Study Signature Sheet, Bullying Perception Survey, School Resource Officer and Student Workshops and the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS). Bauer's book, *On My Honor,* is a story of a boy's guilt over the role he plays in the death of his best friend. Bauer's book was selected for use with anti-bullying training because of the examples of bullying were woven throughout this book.

The Safe Schools Training program was designed to ensure that there is a respectful learning environment for teaching and learning. The State's Safe School program is focused on school safety utilizing four modules: health and safety, discipline-related reports, Internet safety, and anti-bullying resources. Although anti-bullying laws vary from state to state, they generally focus on listing the specific behaviors that constitute bullying (Department of Education, 2018; Stopbullying.gov, 2018). State law requires schools to take specific action regarding bullying, harassment, and intimidation (Stopbullying.gov, 2018). Evidence of a sign-in sheet and a faculty bulletin notifying teachers of this training were available at two schools. A list of professional development opportunities was available. Two were specific to bullying. The school-wide book study was posted throughout the building to make faculty and students aware of the current book being studied.

Evidence was presented at one school where the principal shared the results of the Bullying Perception Survey with the School Resource Officer for Student Workshops. The Bullying Perception Survey was administered to all school-level stakeholders in the school. A sign-in sheet was available for the program led by the School Resource Officer.

Many of the factors mentioned during the interviews were consistent with the literature on school bullying. The factors included physical features, lack of social skills, environments, lower academic achievement, higher truancy rates, loneliness, poor peer relationships, loneliness and depression. The literature addressed depression in reference to bullying and victims. Symptoms of depression can sometimes be more evident or visible than direct evidence of bullying, and hence one possible manner in which bullying can be detected, but only if the adults working with youth are sensitized to this

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possibility. Unfortunately, some manifestations of depression, such as being withdrawn or quiet, can be more easily overlooked than many kinds of disruptive behaviors. In this case, depression was not mentioned during the interviews.

Faculty bulletins at two schools addressed information from the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS), which issued guidance regarding bullying of students with disabilities. Outlined were the school districts' responsibilities to ensure that students with disabilities who are subject to bullying continue to receive free appropriate public education (FAPE). Further, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates that school districts ensure that students with disabilities receive FAPE in the least restrictive environment (LRE), and when they are bullied, and not receiving a meaningful education, which is in itself considered a denial of FAPE.

Theme 2: Behaviors

Bullying can be caused by many factors. The participants in this study aligned on many points with the literature. Environmental and social factors were common issues that were discussed. The participants spoke about the influence of the media on the behaviors of children. The shows on television and the Internet often glorify violence and conflict, which could be reasons why some students look at bullying as a way to address situations. Principal Cunningham spoke about the media as a reason some of the students are not kind to special needs students. She believes that there are "Higher levels of aggression from watching far too much violence." She cited this as a significant reason why some students have misplaced anger.

Counselor Adams thought students' behaviors are the results of their social interactions in and out of the school and could be connected to bullying. She stated,

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"Some kids that have victim personalities, other are struggling academically, and then there are those that may dabble in gang activity." Counselor Baker also saw social and environmental issues:

> I think it just depends on the school. If you're at a school where it's big, and you have a lot of students with disabilities, some of those students may get picked on. If you have a school that's predominantly, I guess, the upper-scale schools, and you got some kids who come in from lower-income families, those students may get bullied. Many of the misbehaviors depend on the school environment. I could say students with disabilities would be my ... that quiet student who doesn't talk to anyone, that's a loner.

Counselor Baker saw loners as the target of bullying. However, her comments appeared to attribute quiet to character. The counselor did not acknowledge that the behavior of the quiet student may be produced by being bullied or being in need of some general social skill development.

> Further, counselor Crosby discussed the student who is isolated from other as voluntary removal and not exclusion. He said, "Generally, kids who isolate themselves from the majority of student population. Also, students with disabilities are often victimized."

> The teachers' responses varied. Teacher Anderson observed,

> I would say kids that maybe are quiet, don't really speak up for themselves, may dress a little differently although we wear a uniform, but it comes down to sneakers or jackets or whatnot. When kids might think that they're coming from a

poor background or they're not popular like everybody else, I would say those type of persons might be targeted.

Teacher Anderson made some reference to social class and poverty, but did not expound on it. Teacher Bennett agreed. She felt that the victim can be,

A quiet person, a person that's a loner, which is not a bad thing. However, they are a target because no one is there to speak up for that person. A person with no friends around them at no time.

She also felt that "Kids with disabilities, they're targeted. They're targeted." Therefore, she used a strategy to build a relationship by pairing special needs students with students with no disability, because she felt as if it gave the students another outlet.

Teacher Charles agreed with teacher Bennett in that she thought students with disabilities are targets for bullying. She stated,

Students who are in the resource programs often are targets and feel different from regular education students as far as how they act or how they may sound. Also, students feel or seem as though they may be different as far as their sexual orientation. Even though I don't think they understand what that is just yet but if they feel as though they may be different in that manner, are targeted or even new students.

The responses of the school principals differed. Principal Adcock looked at social behaviors as causes of bullying. He stated,

A variety of kids are targeted. Some kids don't say anything. It depends on the personality as well as the victim's mindset, self-esteem, confidence. Sometimes

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kids retaliate towards a bully; sometimes kids cower, they don't say anything. Some kids retaliate against somebody else.

Principal Boswell addressed students' physical characteristics as a target for bullying. His response was:

It's always - I would say the odd kids. I mean odd, they may be the ones that are taller. You know they may be chunkier. It might be the kid whose hair doesn't fit. I think sometimes the kids who can't afford the name brand clothing. I think it may be the kids that are, sometimes just nerds. Again, these are words that the kids will say - this kid was a dumb kid or the slower kid, and not really knowing that they could be referring to kids with disabilities.

Principal Cunningham has witnessed causes of bullying at multiple levels due to her diverse experiences. She stated,

I have experience in a school with varied demographics. Most of the kids that were bullying were from more impoverished homes. Because you had the children that were on the lake, you had children that went in the trailer park. Then you had those who were socially awkward….I guess that is the best way of putting that. They didn't have communication skills or just stayed to themselves. Those were the kids that were bullied then.

In this instance, the poorer students were being bullied by the wealthier students. She then noted the role of race as a factor in bullying. "I've been in environments where demographics were majority African-American, and that bullying can be different. When I was at this school, a small group of African Americans were the bullies. I mentioned their race because they would mention the race of the students they bullied in putting

them down." She has also seen when students in the special needs population have been aggressors.

> Sometimes they can be your special needs population that does the bullying. I don't know if they do it because as far as academically they're not on the same level as some of the children and that's how they have to prove themselves. So I've seen bullying in several different ways.

The reactions among the participants were diverse and inconsistent when discussing special education students and the likelihood of them being bullied at school. Counselor Baker, counselor Crosby, teacher Anderson, teacher Bennett, teacher Charles, and principal Boswell felt students with disabilities were more likely to be bullied. When asked, "Are students with disabilities more or less likely to be bullied than nondisabled students?" Counselor Baker said, "I think so. Because a bully likes to pick on somebody that can't defend themselves, or they think can't defend themselves. And who would you think can't defend themselves….A person with a disability." Counselor Crosby agreed,

> More likely, they're an easier target. If it's a physical disability, of course, that's more something that everybody can see and quickly understand why they're being teased, or quickly join in on why they're being teased when they have physical disabilities.

The teachers all agreed that it would be more likely for special needs students to be bullied than nondisabled students. Anderson said, "Yes, because when the other students sense that there's a difference, and they feel like they can get some power over somebody who might be less capable of defending themselves, then yes. They become

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the target in those situations." The sentiments were the same from Anderson and Charles regarding the imbalance of power for student with disabilities.

The principal responses varied. Principal Adcock felt that both groups had an advantage. Principal Adcock said,

I think it's equal because I think kids with disabilities have coping mechanisms as well as survival skills. They're a little bit sharper to combat the disability they may be having. Whether it's their dress, whether it's their vocabulary, whether it's their interaction, whether it's their interests. I think it's just consistent.

He also felt it was dependent upon their social grouping, which they socialize with. Principal Boswell felt special needs students with physical disabilities were most often the victims. Principal Boswell stated,

I really think again, and it goes back to kids that are odd (different). If their learning disability allows them to look like and that they're able to blend with other kids, then I think that those kids probably face less being ostracized than those who may have more noticeable disabilities.

Principal Cunningham did not see bullying as an issue.

Educators must understand the concepts in processing professional development opportunities as it relates to enhancing skills to support children, particularly as they seek to recognize specific behaviors. The participants in this study wanted to be educated on signs of bullying and how to be proactive in handling conflict. They mentioned the need to understand the behaviors of the bully and the victim. The National Staff Development Council (2007) created standards that all professional development should follow. Teacher learning was one of the standards that supported the need for training on bullying

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for the educators in this study. Schools must ensure that all students are taught in an environment that is free of violence and destructive conflict. There was little evidence to support the type training that was received by the participants.

Research Question 3

Do counselors, special education teachers and principals feel that they have the necessary background, training, responsibility and knowledge of best practices to be effective policy-actors regarding the bullying of students with disabilities?

Research Question 3 addressed the preparation of the counselors, special education teachers and the principal on the necessary background, training, responsibility and knowledge of best practices. Preparedness is one emerging theme. Preparation is essential to be consistent and knowledgeable to become effective policy actors regarding the bullying of students with disabilities. Stakeholders who are prepared to address bullying can provide support to school districts to promote healing and resilience to help all students succeed in school and life.

Theme 1: Preparedness

Five interview questions were asked of the participants to address their background, training, responsibility, and knowledge. Table 4.6 addressed their professional instruction for working with students with disabilities. Eight of the nine participants had some level of professional training. Most of the professional training about students with disabilities was provided during postgraduate preparations in Masters and Education Specialist degree programs. Additional training was conducted in counseling programs, workshops, students with disabilities specific professional

development and one in undergraduate school. One counselor did not have training for

students with disabilities.

Table 4.6

Professional Training for Students with Disabilities

Participants	Roles	Yes/No	Advanced Degree	Courses	Professional Development
Adams	Counselor	Yes	Masters	Students with Disabilities	
Baker	Counselor	Yes	Masters	Students with Disabilities	Work in Rehabilitation
Crosby	Counselor	No			
Anderson	Teacher	Yes		Students with Disabilities	District Level
Bennett	Teacher	Yes		Students with Disabilities	District Level
Charles	Teacher	Yes		Students with Disabilities	Building Level
Adcock	Principal	Yes	Education Administration	Students with Disabilities	
Boswell	Principal	Yes		Students with Disabilities – Undergraduate	
Cunningham	Principal	Yes	Masters – Special Education Course	Special Education & The Law, Undergraduate	Building Level

Table 4.7 addressed their levels of satisfaction with the preparation they had

received about bullying. The nine participants were asked about their satisfaction with

their professional development specific to students with disabilities. Two were satisfied;

three had mixed feelings, and four said no.

Table 4.7

Satisfaction with Preparation on Bullying

Participants	Yes/No	Types of Professional Development	
		Experienced	Desired
Adams	No		Ongoing training
Baker	Yes	Training on cyberbullying	Updates on cyberbullying terminology and slang used by students
Crosby	Maybe	Inadequate training – Believe some things cannot be taught	
Anderson	Maybe		Additional training about the victim's rights
Bennett	No		Informal Conversation
Charles	Yes	Annual training at beginning of school year	
Adcock	No		Book talk about kids with disabilities
Boswell	No		How to Handle Cyberbullying
Cunningham	Maybe		Gang Issues, Cyberbullying

The two who were satisfied desired additional professional development.

Counselor Adams shared that she would like to be trained on,

"Different things we don't know about, especially with social media, so I feel like I still

can be trained so I can stay up-to-date with what's going on, such as cyberbullying. I

could use some training just to stay up to date."

In a similar vein, teacher Charles stated,

Even though I have not had a lot of experiences with bullying here at the school, I

know some exists. I haven't seen evidence of bullying. I haven't come across it

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except for two times, and that doesn't mean that it's not happening, that's just not been reported to me. But, as I said, we are trained at the beginning of the school year, and I felt prepared.

Counselor Crosby, teacher Anderson, and principal Cunningham were more ambivalent about their preparation level. Counselor Crosby stated,

I'm satisfied with it, but there's no way in a classroom setting you could actually teach someone how to deal with it. They can prepare you with certain examples or scenarios, but until you actually do it, that's the best teaching, the experience itself. There's no way that you can. You can't gauge someone's emotions.

Teacher Anderson mentioned:

I don't remember us covering bullying type things, which have been some years, so maybe we did. I just don't remember. As far as professional development, we've received a lot of professional development in this area and ways to see what might be going on, because sometimes we have so much going on in our classroom that we don't see all of the signs. We've had professional development that tells us how to look out for things, or have you noticed a change in a student's attitude or difference. That may be a sign that they're being bullied.

Principal Cunningham shared that,

I think we could do more. It's just like the gang issues. We don't want to face the fact that they are here. So then nobody wants to address it. They just hang out with the same crew. I think we have a lot of cyberbullying. I think this is the age that we're in now. That is cyber bullying. How are we going to stop it? I'm concerned because now the students have these Chromebooks.

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The four participants who were not satisfied suggested additional training on informal conversations, the literature on treating students with disabilities and cyberbullying. Counselor Adams advised, "Probably, there needs to be something ongoing."

The participants were asked some open-ended questions about making a difference in bullying incidents. All of the participants felt that they could make a difference (Table 4.8). Table 4.8 was created to address the multiple ways participants thought they could make a difference.

Table 4.8

Making a Difference in Bullying

Participants	Yes/No	Ways to Make a Difference
Adams	Yes	• Imposing consequences for not reporting bullying • Provide counseling to victims • Implement mediation programs • Inform victim's and bully's parents
Baker	Yes	• Educate students about bullying
Crosby	Yes	• Employ coping skills for students and staff
Anderson	Yes	• Provide training on how to set tone in classroom
Bennett	Yes	• Provide more effective training on how to deescalate situations
Charles	Yes	• Identify a safe person in school for victim
Adcock	Yes	• Publicize bullying situations
Boswell	Yes	• Implement training with opportunity to role play Hands-on Approach
Cunningham	Yes	• Schedule listening sessions • Schedule more administrators on duty during social times, before/after school and class changing • Provide ongoing training to staff about social media and cyberbullying

Counselor Adams shared, "We counsel with kids, and we involve the parents in it. I'm a big advocate in calling parents. I believe I do make a difference as the counselor but you know, any administrator will tell you that too." Counselor Baker stated, "Keeping the kids educated about bullying and showing them what bullying looks like is important." Counselor Crosby felt it was essential for the victim to develop coping skills. She indicated that she has worked with students in small groups as a preventive measure; and individually on a case by case basis.

The teacher participants had different responses. Teacher Anderson stated, "I can because you set the tone in your classroom. If it looks like you're going to allow it, then, of course, it's just going to flourish and grow and continue." Teacher Bennett mentioned that "Yes if I had the proper training. I can maybe deescalate some situations before they even get to the point of bullying."

Teacher Charles addressed the victim, "I think that I can make a difference because you want the student who is the victim to know that they have a safe person that they can talk to as far as the situation, and that they know that someone will follow through to make sure it doesn't happen."

The principals in the study addressed the need to publicize the situation, and the value of a hands-on approach and listening. Principal Adcock stated, "I think we should all focus on publicizing situations without disclosing the victim or the aggressor, with forewarning and training and periodic reminders to act appropriately as well as school-wide expectations and norms for the learning environment." Principal Boswell mentioned, "taking that hands-on approach - you know by taking the direct route, by letting kids that are bullies know that I take it personally when you bully in my school,

and I don't want it." Principal Cunningham stated, "Listening and watching is the best way to stay up on it. Also, it is important for me to become knowledgeable of social media such as Kick, Snap Chat, and others."

The participants were asked during the post survey if they thought they were making a difference as it related to bullying. Table 4.8 represents the ways that participants felt they had made changes associated with bullying practices. The methods they employed varied. The following were ways the participants felt they made a difference in working to prevent bullying.

The final question concerned their ability to address bullying as an anti-bullying leader or turning to the principal for support (Table 4.9). All of the participants felt that they could address bullying as a leader and did not necessarily need the help of the principal. However, two participants, both teachers, sought their support on occasions.

Teacher Anderson stated,

I don't depend on guidance from my principal. I think the principal has helped because she has made us aware of bullying. We have done a lot of either reading novels or professional development. I think she created the culture here to the point where teachers know that it's not going to happen here. We need to step it up and make sure that our kids understand that.

Teacher Charles shared how she sets the tone at the beginning of the year:

I let them know that you don't tease anybody. If they make any mistakes, we don't laugh at anybody. As long as I continue to be consistent with making sure that it's an ongoing thing, then I am an anti-bullying leader in my classroom.

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Table 4.9

Anti-bullying Leader and Principal Support

Participants	Anti-bully Leader	Principal Support
Adams	Yes	No
Baker	Yes	No
Crosby	Yes	No
Anderson	Yes	Sometimes
Bennett	Yes	No
Charles	Yes	Yes

Counselors, special education teachers and principals expressed their desire to become better prepared to meet the challenges associated with bullying. When asked about their professional training specific to students with disabilities, only one participant felt she did not have adequate training. Three spoke of training at the Master's and Education Specialist degree level. The participants were not as favorable when asked about training specifically on bullying. Only two participants felt they had adequate training. When asked if they made a difference in their school to curtail bullying, 100% felt confident that they did make a difference. They all thought that they could be better prepared by gaining best practices to be effective policy-actors.

Theme 2: Responsibility

The findings in this study concurred with the literature that bullying could take physical, verbal and online forms in direct and indirect manners (Weissbourd & Jones, 2012). During the interview process, the participants discussed how they took responsibility and shared why they thought others were responsible for their training on bullying and the prevention of bullying. Prior to working in the school system, it appeared that the participants felt their preparation program was responsible for knowledge needed to support the students they served. However, after working in the

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schools, it became the responsibility of the administration to acknowledge what teachers and other staff needed to know and be able to do to prevent bullying behaviors.

As noted in Table 4.10 principal Adcock read a professional journal. Six participants attended professional development. The remaining two participants, counselor Adams, and teacher Bennett, did not receive any additional training prior to the interview. The post survey was conducted to be mindful of the participants' time while gaining necessary information. Further, the post survey was designed to get answers to open-ended questions without asking it in the survey.

Table 4.10

Training on Bullying Before Initial Interview

#	Participants	Role	Professional Readings *	Faculty Meetings	Morning Bulletins	Professional Development
1	Adams	Counselor				
2	Baker	Counselor				X
3	Crosby	Counselor				X
4	Anderson	Teacher				X
5	Bennett	Teacher				
6	Charles	Teacher				X
7	Adcock	Principal	X			
8	Boswell	Principal				X
9	Cunningham	Principal				X

*Journals, articles, text, handouts, etc.

Discussion of Survey

After the interviews were completed and analyzed, which was about an eight weeks period, a survey was administered to the nine participants. The purpose of the survey was to administer a series of questions to determine if any additional information could be gathered about bullying. The post survey was weighted using a 5-point Likert Scale. Table 4.11 presents the ten questions asked of each participant by each question.

Table 4.11

Post Survey Administered to Participants

Interview Statements	SD	D	U	A	SA	Total/Av. Weight
Q1 I feel confident that I can give SWD who are bullied the support they need.	0% 0	0% 0	0% 0	66.67% 6	33.33% 3	4.33% 9
Q2 I feel confident that I can intervene effectively with students who bully others.	0% 0	0% 0	0% 0	55.55% 5	44.44% 4	4.44% 9
Q3 I can initiate appropriate policy responses to bullying incidents.	0% 0	0% 0	0% 0	44.44% 4	55.56% 5	4.56% 9
Q4 I am part of a team in efforts to prevent bullying.	0% 0	22.22% 2	0% 0	33.33% 3	44.44% 4	4.00% 9
Q5 I have leadership responsibility in efforts to prevent bullying.	0% 0	22.22% 2	11.11% 1	33.33% 3	33.33% 3	3.78% 9
Q6 I feel more knowledgeable about ways to reduce bullying.	0% 0	11.11% 1	22.22% 2	44.44% 4	22.22% 2	3.78% 9
Q7 I feel more confident that I can make a difference to stop bullying.	0% 0	11.11% 1	0% 0	55.55% 5	33.33% 3	4.11% 9
Q8 I am more likely to seek out professional development on issues of bullying of SWD.	0% 0	11.11% 1	22.22% 2	33.33% 3	33.33% 3	3.89% 9
Q9 I have spoken to my leader about ways in which we reduce bullying.	11% 1	22.22% 2	0% 0	44.44% 4	22.22% 2	3.44% 9
Q10 I have taken new steps to reduce bullying of SWD. If agree or strongly agree, please explain.	0% 0	22.22% 2	22.22% 2	33.33% 3	22.22% 2	3.56% 9

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Question 1. "I feel confident that I can give SWD who are bullied the support they need". The participants to assess their confidence level that they can give students with disabilities who are bullied the support they need. The responses were 66.67% agree, and 33.33% strongly *agree*. During the face-to-face interviews, the participants did express the same level of confidence that they could provide support to the students with disabilities.

Question 2. "I feel confident that I can intervene effectively with students who bully others." The participants' responses were 55.56% *agree* to 44.44% *disagree* about their confidence level in efficiently intervening for students with disabilities. All principals responded affirmatively when asked this question. In contrast, all teachers responded negatively. The counselors were mixed in their responses. It is interesting to note that none of the participants responded *strongly agree*.

Question 3. "I can initiate appropriate proper policy responses to bully incidents." This question sought to ascertain information about the initiation of appropriate policy in their schools. Four or 44.44% of participants responded *agree*, and 55.56% responded *strongly agree*. All the participants felt they understood policy enough to initiate policy appropriately should an incident occur in their school.

Question 4. "I am part of a team in efforts to prevent bullying." Question 4 was designed to determine how the three participants from each school worked together as a team. Participates yielded a response of 22.22% *disagree*, 33.33% *agree*, and 44.44% *strongly agree*. The team at Alpha Middle School was the only team that totally felt that they were working as a team in efforts to prevent bullying

Question 5. "I have leadership responsibility in efforts to prevent bullying." The participants were asked to assess their personal leadership abilities and capabilities regarding the prevention of bullying. Question 5 revealed that two participants felt that they did not have leadership responsibility to stop bullying; one participant was undecided, and six participants *strongly agreed*. One teacher and one counselor felt they did not have a leader who was focused on stopping bullying. One of the principals was undecided about leadership support to stop bullying.

Question 6. "I feel more knowledgeable about ways to reduce bullying." The responses ranged from disagree to strongly agree about knowledge on ways to reduce bullying. One counselor participant did not feel she had the knowledge to reduce bullying. The survey was administered to determine if they had sought out any additional information since the interview on reducing bullying practices at their schools. The principals felt they had the knowledge to reduce bullying. Two of the teachers were undecided about their knowledge regarding skills and strategies to reduce bullying.

Question 7. "I feel more confident that I can make a difference to stop bullying." The participants were queried as to whether they felt more confident that they can make a difference to stop bullying and 11.11% *disagree*, 55.56% *agree*, and 33.33% *strongly agree*. One counselor participant did not think she could make a different to stop bullying in her school. The other participants agreed to strongly agreed that they could make a difference to stop bullying.

Question 8. "I am more likely to seek out professional development on issues of bullying of SWD." The responses of participants who wanted additional professional development on issues of bullying of students with disabilities ranged from disagree to

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strongly agree. Responses to this question were 11.11% *disagree*, 22.22 *undecided*, 33.33% *agree* and 33.33% *strongly agree*. One counselor did not feel she would seek additional professional development. One teacher and one counselor was undecided as to rather they would seek additional professional development.

Question 9. "I have spoken to my leader about ways in which we reduce bullying." Question 9 was revised from principal to leader to allow the principal to respond to ways the superintendents have spoken about ways to reduce bullying. Three of the nine felt they did not have a conversation about bullying with their leader. Whereas, 66.66% or six participants agreed to strongly agreed they had communication with their leader about bullying.

Question 10. "I have taken new steps to reduce bullying of SWD. If agree or strongly agree, please explain." Question 10 was designed for participants to respond using the Likert scale and the open-ended response that allowed the participants an opportunity to share the new steps taken to reduce bullying of the students with disabilities. The final question asked participants to rate if they had taken further steps to reduce bullying of students with disabilities and to explain if they agree or strongly agree. The results were 22.22% *disagreed*, 22.22% were *undecided*, 33.33% *agreed*, and 22.22% *strongly agreed*. The results for disagreed and undecided may have been influenced by the fact that much of the time since the interview was during summer break. During that period, the opportunities to have such conversations with school leaders were significantly reduced. Five of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that they had made changes to gain additional knowledge or implement new and other

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strategies. This result suggests that asking educators about the issue may be sufficient to inspire deeper learning or for participants to initiate conversations about the issue.

Principal Adcock shared,

I communicate with special education teachers and students at my school daily. I develop a positive relationship with the student with disabilities. I listen and investigate any reports of bullying of students with disabilities. I apply the district discipline policy for harassment, intimidation and bullying policy to any incidents concerning bullying. I inform my supervisor of any incidents regarding bullying.

Teacher Anderson believed that being a special education teacher for so many years:

I feel that I have always been aware and have provided intervention or help for those that are bullied. I find that within my school, it is the students with disabilities that bully their peers that are students with disabilities. I've noticed that my school and district have made many efforts to educate students, parents, and teachers about the effects of bullying. This is something that we constantly talk about, and many students are standing up for those that are being bullied.

Counselor Baker contended "We don't have issues with students bullying any students with disabilities. Our school community is very close, so our students take care of our students with disabilities." Counselor Adams shared that she "attended staff development training, trained staff, and consulted more with special education teachers after the revelations from the initial interview."

Principal Boswell made changes after this initial interview. He stated that,

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Since my interview, I have been more observant of students with disabilities and their interactions with other students. I have also had conversations with teachers about the need for ensuring that they are aware of students who are possible targets for bullies. When I have dealt with students that have been accused of bullying, I have thoroughly explained what bullying is and punished them accordingly.

The intent of the study was to determine if the participants made a change in their practices with regards to their knowledge of bullying as it related to students with disabilities (Table 4.12). During the member checking process, the participants were asked to identify any actions taken since the initial interview. Using Table 4.12 and a check sheet, an X was placed in each column to indicate any training or information gained since the initial training. The last column was designed to allow participants an opportunity to share information not specifically requested by the researcher.

Each of the nine participants was asked to identify the actions taken since the initial interview. Counselor Adams, counselor Crosby, and teacher Anderson read professional journals. Counselor Adams, teacher Anderson, and principal Adcock received additional knowledge from the morning bulletin. An Electronic morning bulletin was prepared by the principal of Alpha Middle School with tips provided by the support staff such as the counselor, nurse, custodian, etc. Teachers can include information in the professional corner. The other two middle schools that participated in the study did have morning bulletins but did not have information related to this topic. Professional development was offered to counselor Adams and principal Adcock. Counselor Crosby presented classroom guidance, and teacher Bennett had a classroom guidance session

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jointly with the School Resource Officer. Teacher Charles indicated that she had not

made any changes since the interview.

Table 4.12

Actions Taken on Bullying After Initial Interview

#	Participants	Professional Readings *	Faculty Meeting	Morning Bulletin	Professional Development	Other
1	Adams	X	X	X	X	
2	Baker					
3	Crosby	X				Classroom Guidance
4	Anderson	X	X	X		
5	Bennett					Classroom Guidance; Resource Officer Lectures
6	Charles					
7	Adcock		X	X	X	
8	Boswell					Greater interaction with teachers and students
9	Cunningham			X		

*Journals, articles, text, handouts, etc.

School Survey Responses

It was important to understand the opinions of the participants in relation to their

specific middle schools. The same ten survey questions were given to each of the

participants (Figure 4.3). The survey was designed to determine if there were any

changes or added knowledge since the initial face-to-face interview. A survey was used

to gather additional information in the event additional changes may have happened

among the participants as it relates to bullying. For survey questions 1 – 3 the counselor,

special education teacher and the principal at the three middle schools all responded

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agree to *strongly agree*. Further, the participants had the opportunity to provide comments.

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1. I feel confident that I can give SWD who are bullied the support they need.
2. I feel confident that I can intervene effectively with students who bully others.
3. I can initiate appropriate policy responses to bullying incidents.
4. I am part of a team in efforts to prevent bullying.
5. I have leadership responsibility in efforts to prevent bullying.
6. I feel more knowledgeable about ways to reduce bullying.
7. I feel more confident that I can make a difference to stop bullying.
8. I am more likely to seek out professional development on issues of bullying of SWD.
9. I have spoken to my principal about ways in which we reduce bullying.
10. I have taken new steps to reduce bullying of SWD. If agree or strongly agree, please explain.

Figure 4.3: Survey Items

Participants at Alpha Middle School responded to the ten questions and provided comments. For survey question 4, the counselor, special education teacher and the principal responded *agree* to *strongly agree*. When asked survey question 5, "I have leadership responsibility in efforts to prevent bullying," the responses differed for each of the respondents. The counselor *agreed*, the special education teacher was *undecided*, and the principal *strongly agreed*. The counselor and the principal strongly agreed on survey questions 6 – 10. The special education teacher was undecided about feeling knowledgeable about: ways to reduce bullying; more likely to seek out professional development; and taken new steps to reduce bullying of SWD. Additionally, the special education teacher at this school agreed that she was more confident making a difference to reduce bullying, but she had not spoken to the principal about ways to reduce bullying.

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Participants at Beta Middle School responded to the ten survey questions. The counselor and principal provided comments about steps they have taken to reduce bullying. For survey questions 4, 5, 7, and 9, the counselor, special education teacher, and the principal responded *agree* to *strongly agree*. Differences for the participants at Beta Middle School were for survey questions 6 and 8. The special education teacher was *undecided* about her knowledge of ways to reduce bullying; and the new steps taken to reduce bullying of SWD. The counselor and the principal both *agreed* that they were both knowledgeable about ways to reduce bullying and have taken new steps to reduce bullying.

Participants at Gamma Middle School responded to the ten survey questions. The responses to survey questions 4 to 10 differed among the participants. The principal and the teacher did not feel as if they were a part of a team to prevent bullying. However, the counselor *strongly agreed* that she was a part of a team. When asked question 5, if they have leadership responsibilities in effort to prevent bullying, the special education teacher and the counselor *disagreed* and the principal *strongly agreed*. The special education teacher *disagreed* that she was knowledgeable about ways to reduce bullying. However, the counselor and the principal *agreed*. For questions 7 and 8, the counselor doubted that he could make a difference, and had not sought professional development on issues of bullying for students with disabilities. The principal and special education teacher agreed that they can make a difference to stop bullying; and both agreed that they would seek professional development on issues of bullying. For question 9, the teacher and the counselor had not spoken to their principal about ways in which they could reduce bullying. The principal agreed that she had spoken to other principals about ways to

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reduce bullying. For survey question 10 about steps taken to reduce bullying of student with disabilities, the teacher *disagreed*, the counselor was *undecided* and the principal *agreed*.

In summary of the responses of participants' survey results, the responses were mixed from school to school. The results of the participants from Alpha Middle School appeared in agreement with additional work on bullying. Whereas the participants at Gamma Middle School were not consistent the work associated with bullying. The counselor at this school did not appear to have the knowledge on bullying that the teacher and principal had gained during the last months of school. The teacher at Beta Middle School responses showed additional knowledge and training was still needed.

Counselor Survey Responses

The counselors from the three participating schools differed in many of their responses. For survey questions 1 to 4 and 6, the three counselors *agreed* to *strongly agreed* about support, intervention, policy, knowledgeable and teaming as it related to helping students with disabilities against bullying. For survey question 5, and 7 to 10, counselors at Alpha Middle and Beta Middle *agreed* to *strongly agreed* that they had leadership responsibility to prevent bullying, made a difference to stop bullying, sought professional development and spoke to principal about bullying, and had taken steps to reduce bullying of students with disabilities. The counselor at Gamma Middle School *disagreed* with survey questions 5, and 7 to 9, and was *undecided* about 10.

The counselor at Alpha Middle School commented on the steps she had taken to reduce bullying of students with disabilities. Counselor Adams attended staff development training, trained staff on anti-bullying strategies, and consulted with special

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education teachers to learn more about special education students. Counselors Baker and Crosby did not comment on steps taken.

Special Education Teacher Survey Responses

Three special education teachers responded to the 10 survey statements. On statements 1 to 3 and 7, they agreed that they could provide support, intervene and make a difference in situations of students being bullied. When asked about being a part of a team, teacher Anderson and teacher Bennett responses agreed with their counselors that they were a part of a team; and teacher Charles' response was consistent with his principal in that they did not think they were part of a team with it came to working with bullying for students with disabilities. When asked about leadership responsibilities, the special education teachers differed in their responses; teacher Anderson was *undecided*, teacher Bennett *agreed*, and teacher Charles *disagreed*. Survey responses for question 6 showed that teachers Anderson and Bennett were *undecided* and teacher Charles *disagreed* that they were knowledgeable about ways to reduce bullying. Survey responses for question 8 showed that teachers Anderson and Bennett were *undecided* and teacher Charles *agreed* that they were likely to seek out professional development on issues of bullying for students with disabilities. Teachers Anderson and Charles had not spoken to the principal about ways to reduce bullying, and teacher Bennett had spoken to her principal. When asked if they had taken any steps to reduce bullying, teacher Anderson was undecided and teachers Bennett and Charles had not taken any steps to reduce bullying.

The special education teachers at Alpha Middle School and Beta Middle School made comments about bullying, but not specific to the steps they had taken to reduce

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bullying of students with disabilities. Special education teacher Anderson felt that she had always been aware of and provided interventions for those that were bullied. She felt that bullying happened among students with disabilities and not regular education students bullying the students with disabilities. Further, she stated that the school and district made efforts to educate students, parents and teachers about the effects of bullying. Special education teacher Bennett did not see any issues with bullying students with disabilities. She credited the school community's closeness for taking care of the students with disabilities.

Principal Survey Responses

Three principals responded to the 10 survey statements. On nine of the 10 statements, the principals agreed to strongly agreed on all responses with the exception of survey statement 4 about being a part of a team. Principals Adcock and Boswell responses *agreed* with their counselors and teachers that they were a part of a team; principal Cunningham' response was consistent with his teacher in that they did not think they were part of a team when it came preventing bullying for students with disabilities.

The principals at Alpha Middle School and Beta Middle School made comments specific to steps taken to reduce bully for students with disabilities. Principal Adcock of Alpha Middle School, felt that he communicated with special education teachers and students daily, in addition to developed a positive relationship. Further, he listened and investigate reports of bullying of students with disabilities. He spoke of applying the district discipline policy for harassment, intimidation and bullying policy to any incident concerning bullying. Principal Boswell, leader of Beta Middle School, addressed how he had become more observant of students with disabilities since the initial interview.

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Additionally, he started having more conversations with teachers about the need for ensuring students are not targets for bullying. Principal Cunningham of Gamma Middle School, like the counselor and special education teacher at her school, did not have a comment.

Delimitations

A limitation of the study was the exclusion of regular education teachers. Regular education teachers teach students with disabilities and would likely have knowledge of bullying. They were not included because they were not universally expected to have specific expert knowledge needed by a leadership team for addressing the issue (expertise in special education, bullying, and leadership). Another delimitation of the study was the exclusion of assistant principals and other administrators. Assistant principals and other administrators are often charged with administering consequences for discipline. The assistant principals and other administrators were not included in the study because one school did not have assistant principals and it was important the study wanted to work with comparable groups of participants with the same job description. In addition, the principals at each of the schools indicated that bullying was handled by the principal. Another limitation of the study was the specification of the anti-bullying program that was used in the school. The State required counselors to administer anti-bullying training in every school. Information specific to the anti-bullying program was excluded from the study because the focus of the study was on the experiences of the participants and not specific to one program.

Summary

The primary purpose of this study was to improve the preparation and leadership of counselors, special education teachers and principals to prevent bullying of students with disabilities. Chapter 4 presented the data collection and data analysis based on interviews, document analysis, and survey. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach with predetermined questions. The interview questions were aligned to Research Questions 1 – 3. The finding for Research Question 1 presented the thoughts and opinions of the counselors, special education teachers, and principals to gather their perceptions about bullying of students with disabilities. While the participants did acknowledge that there was a problem with bullying at each school, it was not considered severe. Further, each school handled bullying differently. The themes that emerged were bullying, interventions, and social media/cyberbullying.

Research Question 2 sought an explanation from school counselors, special education teachers and principals regarding why students with disabilities were bullied. The participants did not see much of a distinction between the students with disabilities being bullied any more than the more unfortunate children, new students, or students who dressed a certain way being bullied. In fact, several participants said the students with disabilities were often the bully. The teacher participants expressed how the disabilities act protected students with disabilities. The themes that emerged were professional training – bullying and behaviors.

The researcher was interested in the preparation to address bullying in schools. Research Question 3 was written to gain an understanding from the participants on their perceptions of the necessary background, training, responsibility and knowledge of best

practices to be effective policy-actors regarding the bullying of students with disabilities. The participants received training from various places. Eight of the nine participants were trained in their course work to work with students with disabilities. One participant did not have any training. The themes that emerged were preparedness and responsibility.

CHAPTER 5. RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Chapter 5 provides the results, conclusions and recommendation gathered and analyzed from the perceptions and observations of teachers, counselors, and administrators about the bullying of students with disabilities in three South Carolina middle schools.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the results, followed by the conclusions. The conclusions were organized around each research question. Recommendations are presented to enhance further research and classroom practices. Implications were included in this final chapter to reflect on the theories associated with this study and the knowledge gained from reviewing the literature. Finally, the researcher's reflections document the personal perspectives that were learned from this investigation.

Summary of the Findings

This study used a phenomenological design to explore how nine educators perceived the bullying of students with disabilities. In the analysis of the data, seven major themes emerged from the responses of teachers, counselors, and principals. The interviews, document reviews, and observations provided data that were triangulated in order to delve into the perspectives of nine educators in in the north-central region of South Carolina. The seven themes are bullying, interventions, social

media/cyberbullying, professional training – bullying, behaviors linked to bullying, preparedness, and responsibility.

Bullying

The findings in this study were consistent with the research in several areas. To review briefly, key issues related to bullying in the literature include the following. "Bullying," according to Olweus (1993), "poisons the educational environment and affects the learning of every child." A 2009 study conducted by Massachusetts Youth Health Survey was done to assess the association between school violence and other risk factors and being involved in or affected by bullying as a bully, victim or bully-victim. This assessment showed differences in risk factors for students in all bullying categories, compared with persons who reported being neither bullies nor victims. Therefore, school campuses have implemented safety measures in their quest to prevent bullying (Maxwell, 2006; DeVoe, Kaffenberger, & Chandler, 2005). Schools throughout the United States have participated in training designed to handle bullying problems, to recognize such behaviors and have implemented zero tolerance programs (Alsaker, 2004; Newman-Carlson & Horne, 2004).

The nine participants all felt that there was little tolerance for bullying in their school. The goal of all schools is to have zero incidents of bullying. Oltman (2010) maintained that an expectation of zero incidents was perhaps unrealistic, but schools should continue to examine and implement best practices that eliminate or reduce the breeding environment for bullying by adopting bullying prevention policies, programs, and interventions. Bullying existed in all schools in this study, but was generally perceived to be at a minimal level.

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Austin et al., (2012) reported that bullying prevention programs are time-consuming and require strategic planning. Although there was one mention of discipline plans and documents to support the comments, there was no evidence of any programs specific to bullying. However, the evidence suggested that the schools did not have a high rate of bullying behaviors at the schools in this study. The school counselor at each school had classroom programs that addressed discipline. However, there was no evidence of implementation of bullying prevention programs in the documents that were reviewed.

The finding also revealed that all of the participants lack clarity about what bullying looked like in general. They and students used a colloquial definition. As a result, many examples of ordinary conflict received the label bullying. But in fact, many of these incidents did not meet the basic criteria for bullying, including the inequality of power between the bully and victim and the ongoing nature of bullying. The fact that they did not have an analytically distinct understanding of the definition of bullying means that they cannot address it specifically, and it fell into the larger bucket of conflicts to address.

During the interviews, examples of bullying behaviors that were reported to staff seemed often to be individual incidents. The participants did not see bullying as a major problem at their schools when looking at individual incidents. Ultimately, they are treating individual episodes. The patterned nature of bullying is not evident in this study.

Interventions

Interventions are critical to ensuring preventive measures for the bully and the victim. According to the literature review, the Prevention Center uses the term "bullying

prevention" instead of "anti-bullying" to emphasize a proactive approach and philosophy, framing bullying as an issue to which there is a solution. To effectively stop the bullying, on-site school counselor programs, teacher interventions and principal actions were implemented.

While there were programs to address bullying at each school, the strategies differed. At one school, there was a policy of zero tolerance for bullying, and it was actively enforced. At this school, they define zero tolerance as "No rule violation will be tolerated." The principal described how the rule requires that there must be some action regarding the violation of the rule, but it does not define the consequences of the action. The principal indicated that they do not have a mandatory remedy. However, the counselor also had a proactive intervention when there was a possibility of intimidation. The counselor believed in mediations and small group when intimidations such as rumor-spreading, cyberbullying or exclusion from groups happens. When she can identify the victim and the bully, she brought them together because she believed that attaching an issue forthrightly without blame frees all involve up for open dialogue. The intervention involved notifying the teacher and meeting with the student to raise awareness of the problem. Often, students are not aware that their behavior can be classified as bullying. Conflict resolution was used as a strategy to address bullying after a bullying behavior was identified. A process defined as student recanting was used to help students who were unaware of actions considered to be bullying. In school and out of school suspension were strategies used to punish students for repeated bullying behaviors. Conferencing was also used as an intervention to help students understand the appearances of bullying or other misbehaviors.

Finally, it was found that when students were identified as being bullied, a support system was developed for the victim. That support system consisted of periodic meetings that included coping skills. This approach to bullying was often reactive and responsive, not proactive and preventative. For example, one counselor was informed of a student being bullied via Facebook. The counselor brought both girls to her office, discussed the problem, had the students apologize, then called the parents of the victim and the bully. In this scenario, the counselor was reactive even though you could say she was being responsive to something. She did not adopt a proactive method to prevent the behavior. The participant described the situation in terms of their reactive/responsive ways and not as an intervention to be more proactive in preventing future occurrences.

Social Media/Cyberbullying

Approximately 34% of students report experiencing cyberbullying as a result of some form of social media during their lifetime (Patchin, 2015). Additionally, 15% of students admitted to cyberbullying others during their lifetime (Patchin, 2015). Although the literature reported a significant percentage of cyberbullying, the participants in this study did not see bullying as a significant problem. Some did, however, know the type of bullying today aligned to technology. Cyberbullying is common for students today because of the use of social media such as Twitter, Facebook and other forms of social media. Those who saw social media as a method for bullying felt the manner and mode of bullying have just changed over time, but social activity was consistent. From 2006-2012, reports show teens are sharing more information about themselves on social media sites (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2013). Twenty years ago, bullying would be identified when the student said something verbally that was inappropriate or wrote a

note with derogatory comments. In this case, the note or comments were specific to a few or one person. Today's students are using multiple forms of bullying that go far beyond the singular person.

Literature and documents at the school consisted of research on cyberbullying and social media. Approximately 10% of teens used Facebook and most reported the ability to manage their account settings (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2013). As of 2012, teenagers used social media and shared personal information (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2013):

91% posted photos (up from 79% in 2006)

71% posted school name (up from 49% in 2006)

71% posted the city where they live (up from 61% in 2006)

53% posted email address (up from 29% in 2006)

20% posted cell phone number (up from 2% in 2006).

Some of the participants noted the use of social media for cyberbullying at their schools.

The social media problems tended to start outside of the school and start from posted information about another student on Instagram, Facebook, or Twitter. The findings from this study revealed that social media is gradually becoming a problem. Cyberbullying was not something that was a problem at one school, but the participants from one school had seen an increase in negative comments on Twitter and Instagram. One counselor felt cyberbullying delayed the possibilities of altercations in some situations because the administrators were able to get a head-up of the potential problem. One counselor felt the cyberbullying was a growing problem that they needed to become better prepared to address.

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Professional Training – Bullying

Bullying has become a significant problem in most public schools in America. According to remarks at the annual Federal Partners in Bullying Prevention Summits, "teachers want to help stop bullying, but they don't know how. Most try to help, but few receive training on how to do so" (para. 1). The participants' comments were consistent with the literature. They mentioned the need for additional training, professional development, working with school leaders modeling as possible ways to gain further knowledge and skills. Cohn and Canter (2003) reported that research-based training gives teachers practical steps to take to respond to bullying.

The participants in this study reported that education was vital for them to know more about bullying and for them to know how to deal with bullying situations. Further, principals in the study shared articles about bullying and data that showed trends in bullying in schools. It was also found that the special education manual provided consistent information on multiple aspects of bullying. Ensuring that teachers are knowledgeable on issues relating to bullying was evident regarding what could be found at school sites. Documents at each of the schools revealed information related to bullying was available for teachers, counselors, and principals.

Behaviors Linked to Bullying

Bullying is the most frequent school-based violent activity in our society (Cohn & Canter, 2003). As such, there is not one single cause that points definitively to the cause of bullying. However, there are underlying factors that permit bullying and link to behaviors that are specific to bullying. Behaviors specific to bullying included teasing, threats, physical abuse, and name calling. Behaviors factors included repeated abuse,

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intentional harm to others, and groups (gender, race, sexual orientation). The findings in this study shared some of the behavioral factors in the literature.

In a few bullying instances, students exhibited demeaning acts toward others. For example, bullies seem to feel the need to hit others when they know the student will not fight back. Their goal is to make the other students--often students with disabilities, but not always--feel powerless. Another behavior is exclusion, singling a student out to isolate him or make him feel alone. It was noted that this happens through social media or some type of sport. Students also bully students when they do not perform well academically. There is also the opposite effect whereas students who are struggling can often exhibit bullying behavior when they become frustrated. Another negative behavior happened when students were teased in front of their friends. Children are picked on due to the low social status that was seen in the appearance, lack of funds to participate in activities, etc. The participants spoke of cyberbullying as a reason some students are not kind to special needs students. Olweus (2007) considers some children struggling academically and affiliating with gang with a tendency of picking on others as having a victim personality. They are the bullies, but they feel as if they have been mistreated at some point and time. The bully victims were victims of bullying and now bully others. They tend to be easily aroused when harassing weaker people. The bully victims are usually depressed and anxious (Olweus, 2007). Those struggling academically tend to act out to deflect from the fact that they do not know the information, or they are not prepared for class. Those participating in a gang maybe performing an initiation, or simply enjoy harassing others.

It was also found that students with disabilities were targeted due to how they act, if they are unfamiliar to the group or how they may be perceived by others. Specifically, students were made to feel different based on their sexual orientation. While students new to a school are often the target, the students who identify themselves as gay, or thought to be gay, are most often bullied in public and on forms of social media. Numerous cases have been identified where students have committed suicide due to school bullying and cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). Hinduja and Patchin (2010) studied 4,400 students between 11 and 18 years of age. The students identified as homosexual were more likely the target of bullying or cyberbullying. This also happened to students who were new at a school. While this happened on rare occasions, it had been witnessed by a teacher and alluded to by a principal. There were also times that students with disabilities were aggressors and retaliated against those who bothered them and became bullies themselves.

It is important to acknowledge that victims of bullying behaviors may not have the vocabulary to express themselves when they are being bullied. While students may know that they are the target of bullying tactics, they may have limitations when discussing what is happening to them or sharing it with people with authority to intervene.

Preparedness

The participants in this study spoke of the need to be better prepared for working with bullying issues. Studies have found that approximately 30% of students in grades 6-10 are involved in bullying, as a perpetrator, victim, or both (Isernhagen, & Harris, 2004; Cohn & Canter, 2003). While the participants in the study did not have a high incidence

of reported bullying, they did feel like being prepared was essential for keeping the numbers low. Additionally, preparedness was addressed to better understand how to work with special needs students in bullying situations.

It was found that knowing how to intervene effectively with students who have been bullied, students who intimidate others, and students who watch bullying happen mainly for prevention and intervention. The teachers and counselors thought it would be beneficial to investigate implementing a bullying prevention and intervention program. Specific training on social media and cyberbullying was recommended.

Principals spoke about how the literature on bullying has increased over the years. All of the principals talked about using media for the staff to better understand bullying behaviors. They wanted staff to understand: how bullying occurs; being effective in preventing bullying; and the effects of bullying on students. The participants also recommended that the school staff take bullying prevention ongoing professional training. It was also suggested that principals do more video training that provides reenactments of bullying behaviors to help raise awareness of overall bullying.

A third of the participants in the study felt that bullying should be addressed in some form. They were concerned and felt responsible for ensuring that bullying would be addressed. As such they spoke to the principal about ways to reduce bullying. One way they would address the bully would be to make sure they understood the rules. They wanted to make the rules clear and enforced by the administrators and teachers. Another was to be prepared was to engage the parent in the discussion. Additionally, the staff needs to be prepared to recognize warning signs for the regular education student and the special education student. Reporting seems to happen when there is a trusting relationship

with an individual teacher. Relationship building is a skill that all educators are not prepared in how to form. They did not seem to be sensitized to the fact that many special needs students are not easily able to express their difficulties, and so acts of bullying were more likely to be underreported. All too often, the schools are not prepared to address the concerns of the special education students associated with harassment. There is overall agreement that bullying cannot be tolerated in schools, but the reality is that bullying continues for students with disabilities. The Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) requires that schools must remedy the bullying problems that prohibit students with disabilities from learning. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates that special education teachers are prepared to address the problem. School counselors are prepared to develop and present classroom guidance lessons that identify ways to reduce bullying for all children, but not specific to the special needs students. There is little preparation for school principals regarding strategies that target the special needs children and bullying.

Responsibility

The findings in this study concurred with the literature that bullying could take physical, verbal and online forms in direct and indirect manners (Weissbourd & Jones, 2012). It is the responsibility of the administration to identify what teachers need to know and to be able to do in order to prevent bullying.

The study found that the participants at the three middle schools either agreed or strongly agreed that they were responsible for preventing bullying. They further decided or strongly agreed that they could effectively intervene with students who bully others. When asked if they were knowledgeable about ways to reduce bullying, one-third of the

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participants felt that they did not have the requisite skills. There was also one who lacked confidence that they could make a difference in stopping bullying. Six of the nine participants, or 66%, would seek out professional development on issues of bullying specific to students with disabilities. The administrators took on additional responsibility or trained staff as a result of the initial interviews. Two principals have organized staff to create a bullying prevention plan. One principal implemented a bullying information component in the staff meeting as a means for ongoing training to improve the knowledge and skills for staff working with all students. Two participants signed up for additional professional development. Seven of the nine participants participated in some form of training or reading to increase their knowledge and skills after being aware of bullying practices.

Finally, for school stakeholders to be accountable for students with special needs learning in an environment that is conducive to learning, they must follow the mandates outlined in IDEA. They are responsible for ensuring students with special needs are not being bullied. As such, they must be aware of things that go on outside their view. That is, they know that they do not know, but they generally seem passive about that fact. They generally rely on students informing them, whether victims or witnesses, but may not systematically make that possible.

Conclusions

The research findings she light on how special education teachers, counselors, and principals perceive the bullying of students with disabilities in middle schools and how well they feel prepared to address it. This section revisits the research questions.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 addressed the perceptions of counselors, special education teachers and principals about bullying of students with disabilities. Specifically, the study sought to determine if counselors, special education teachers and principals felt bullying was a problem. Further, if bullying was indeed a problem, the researcher wanted to know what was being done about the bullying problem and the distribution of responsibility for addressing bullying. The themes that emerged from the data analysis were bullying, interventions, and social media.

It was determined from data collected and analyzed in this study that the counselors, special education teachers and principals felt that there was little to no bullying of students with disabilities. Only one participant felt students with disabilities were being bullied. Notably, one participant felt that students with disabilities were often the aggressors because they lack coping mechanisms. The participants acknowledged that there was bullying at each school. However, they were satisfied that the bullying behaviors were minimal and not a systemic problem.

For the bullying problems that did exist, the participants discussed the roles of the teachers, counselors, and principals in addressing the bullying problems. It was determined that the teacher was to send the students to the counselors for the first step, in fact, finding information about the bullying incident. While this was the procedure at each of the three schools, teachers at two schools felt the need to gather information before sending the students to the counselor. The counselors had an in-classroom plan for teaching about bullying. The principals in this study had many expectations for addressing bullying behaviors. Two principals worked directly with the counselors. The

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other principal sent bullying guidelines for the school counselor to implement without input from the counselor. The counselor did not feel prepared to implement the bullying strategies during classroom counseling or small group discussions.

It was concluded that bullying existed at a minimal level at each school. However, it should be noted that the researcher did not have an objective source on the levels/rates of bullying. There were only the self-provided perceptions of the participants. It may be awkward for them to admit that the levels are high when they have responsibility for the issue. It was further found that there was a procedure at each school for addressing bullies. It was concluded that bullies often targeted students in poverty and new students.

Social cognitive theory was chosen to understand the intricacy of bullying in schools, since bullying was seen as a social relationship problem. The school counselors and principals in this study showed some evidence of working with those who bully others. Further, one teacher found a way to interact with students to curtail bullying at the onset of school. The school counselor was charged with teaching social skills as a means to curtail bullying. The literature showed how students who bullied others tend to have complex issues, and the need for the bully to interact with others in a positive social environment.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 sought to understand how counselors, special education teachers and principals explain why students with disabilities were bullied, and what they think can be done about it. It was essential to understand the participants' implicit theories of bullying students with disabilities. The relevant themes that emerged from the data analysis included professional training about bullying and behaviors.

The counselors, special education teachers and principals had varied beliefs about why students with disabilities were bullied. A principal and a counselor both felt bullying could be attributable to differences. For example, students who looked a certain way, or could not afford the current stylish clothes, or did not speak up for themselves may be bullied. Others felt that students new to the school may be intimidated. Another finding was that students are bullied in retaliation for those who are bullying them or others. As such, the implicit theories of bullying students with disabilities varied among participants.

The participants felt the staff needed more education to ensure they had more information on what could be done about bullying students with disabilities. Information including articles, journals, and professional development was evident in each of the three schools where bullying education had been addressed. It was apparent that bullying education did occur at each school. There were no documents to ensure staff and leadership given reliability training to determine what could be done about bullying.

The participants perceived that students with disabilities were not particularly singled out for bullying. However, it was concluded that the teachers, counselors, and principals believed that there are multiple reasons why students with disabilities would be targeted for bullying. It was further concluded the students with disabilities could also be the bullies.

According to Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, individuals' thoughts, motivation and actions are based on whether they believe they can or cannot perform a task. One of the findings in this study was that the school counselors, teachers and principals perceived bullying differently or according to a specific occurrence. While

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many of the participants felt they could control bullying, there were often differences within the school and certainly among participants.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 examined the perceptions of counselors, special education teachers, and principals regarding their background, training, responsibility, and knowledge of best practices to be effective policy-actors regarding the bullying of students with disabilities. The theme that emerged from the data analysis was preparedness.

The counselors who participated in the study were at both extremes and in the middle as to their effectiveness as policy-actors regarding the bullying of students with disabilities. One counselor felt that she was not prepared and needed ongoing training. The other counselor was satisfied with the level of training. However, she felt the need to be updated on current bullying behaviors. The third counselor was unsure of her preparedness to be an effective policy-actor. She did not think skills to work with bullies could be taught.

The special education teachers who participated in the study had varying degrees of confidence in their effectiveness as policy-actors to address the bullying of students with disabilities. One teacher felt that the annual training provided at the beginning of the school year was sufficient for him to be satisfied with his preparation. Another teacher was partially satisfied and felt she needed to revisit the impact of bullying on the victim. The third teacher did not feel satisfied with her effectiveness as a policy-actor. She thought that there should be more informal conversations to prepare to address bullying.

The principals who participated in the study were either not sure or dissatisfied

with their preparation to be effective policy-actors regarding the bullying of students with disabilities. Two principals were not satisfied with their training. They wanted additional professional development and information on cyberbullying. One principal also felt he needed more information on cyberbullying as well as on gang issues.

The counselors, special education teachers, and principals suggested multiple ways to make a difference in bullying. It was recommended that there be more opportunities for administrator trainings, counseling and more significant interactions with parents. Additionally, they recommended more work with students to educate them about bullying, coping skills and information on how to support the victims. It is also vital for a teacher to have the training to set the tone in the classroom and to de-escalate situations. Further, it is essential for all staff to learn how to listen, what to watch for, cyberbullying and social media.

While both the counselors and special education teachers felt they were leaders in anti-bullying, they varied in the level of support they received from their principal. None of the counselors felt supported by principals with respect to anti-bullying. However, one teacher felt supported, one felt supported sometimes, and one did not feel supported.

The counselors, special education teachers and principals varied in their beliefs that they had the requisite training to be effective policy-actors regarding the bullying of students with disabilities. Each of the participants felt they were making a difference and credited themselves for the low bullying incidence. All staff needed additional knowledge about ways to make a difference in bullying. It can be concluded that the nature of support to combat bullying, may need to be clarified in every school. There was considerable variation in their responses.

Research determined that 14 to 20% of students will experience bullying at some point during their school years (Elinoff, Chafouleas & Sassu, 2004). If those statistics are accurate, then millions of American students stand to benefit from more extensive preparation of school counselors, teachers and principals.

Recommendations

This study was designed to bring awareness of bullying to educators who work with students with disabilities. Based on the data collected, analyzed and the findings, recommendations were made for future research. Based on the conclusions drawn from this study, recommendations for future practice were given.

Recommendations for Future Research

Creating an educational environment for faculty knowledgeable and skilled on how to work with students who act out bullying behaviors and students who are bullying can happen if research is continual. Therefore, future research is necessary to determine effective practices for school stakeholder.

It was revealed in this study that appearance, low achievement, size, and other descriptors that society deem unacceptable were factors targeted by bullies. More studies should be conducted on the factors that target. The factors included physical features, lack of social skills, environments, lower academic achievement, higher truancy rates, loneliness, poor peer relationships, loneliness, and depression.

The study suggested that participating in a study may sensitize participants to an issue and inspire them to learn more and to take action. It is recommended that this possibility of research-as-intervention is explored in other issues and other contexts. It may be the case that research can be a useful tool for policy change.

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Olweus (1993) maintains that bullying poisons the educational environment and affects the learning of every child. It is recommended that a survey be administered to a larger sample of counselors, teachers, and administrators at the three schools to determine if the other staff perceived bullying in a similar manner. It is also recommended that research be conducted with parents and students. It would be interesting to know if the parents' responses to bullying of students with disabilities are consistent with the responses of the counselors, special education teachers and principals. Studies have found that approximately 30% of students in grades 6-10 are involved in bullying, as a perpetrator, victim, or both (Cohn & Canter, 2003; Isernhagen, & Harris, 2004). Further research is necessary to better understand why administrators, counselors and teachers seem to perceive lower levels of bullying than these studies suggest.

Recommendations for Practice

Continual dialogue can lead to the adoption of much needed practices for the effective implementation of methods to deter bullying. Active discussions can create more conversations among leaders on strategies to eradicate bullying behaviors while educating school stakeholders who are charged with working directly with school students. Recommendations are made to support practices.

It is recommended that ongoing and continual professional development be conducted in schools with or without the high incidences of bullying. Concerns about school violence have led to more significant support from local police. Police and school resource officers have assumed greater responsibility for helping school officials ensure students' safety. Teachers can gain greater insights if they understand what precipitates bullying. Working with police and others in authority will provide educators with

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strategies necessary to identify the signs of bullying.

It is recommended that a bully survey is administered to determine the extent of bullying at the three schools in this study. It is also recommended to determine if the students, parents and other staff perceptions are consistent with the opinions of the participants in this study.

International research suggests that bullying is prevalent in schools and occurs in middle schools and at all grade levels, although most frequently at the elementary level. It happens slightly less often in middle schools, and less so, but still regularly, in high schools. High school freshmen are particularly vulnerable. As such, it is recommended that school districts create a district-wide training on bullying prevention and bullying awareness. Training should be required for all stakeholders in the school system.

It is recommended that a district-wide conference day is planned to educate all stakeholders about bullying practices, strategies, and resources. Eight percent of students say they are victimized at least once a week (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 2001). With this knowledge and other data and studies presented in the review of the literature, it would be necessary to continue with the plans to help the teacher learn early signs of bullying.

It is recommended that each school create an educational resource library for anti-bullying resources. The resources should be updated on regular basis to ensure the current research, strategies, and information are readily available. The Library School Journal compiled a list of resources for media specialists, parents, and educators that highlight what authors are doing to fight against bullying. This list of devices should be a part of school's collections of anti-bullying resources.

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October is National Bullying Prevention Awareness Month. Schools should unite to educate and bring awareness to the bullying epidemic. With all schools acknowledging the dangers of bullying, bullying can be obliterated from schools and communities.

It is recommended that the principals in this study continue with plans to develop and implement a bullying plan. Olweus (1993) has suggested that for a bullying intervention program to be successful, school leaders must place the responsibility for solving the problem with the adult. As such, it is essential for the adult to have adequate and continual training with short and long-term goals. While the planning committee should have representations from all groups, including students and parents, it is also essential that this planning committee create action items targeted to eradicating bullying in the school.

Implications

Felix and McMahon (2006) stated that bullying affects the psychological and physical safety of students. As such, there are multiple implications for schools not addressing the bullying that may be happening in their schools and districts. Bullying affects the school climate. Therefore, it is essential for schools to implement successful anti-bullying plans. Successful anti-bullying programs are designed to ensure the participants can know and understand bullying issues and school needs necessary to make intervention programs more effective.

The findings in this study were mixed among counselors, special education teachers and principals on why students with disabilities were bullied. This finding has some implications for reliability training for faculty and staff. All stakeholders need to understand why children are being bullied and have some common understandings. Often

in schools, the victims are likely to be victimized because they appear small, weak, insecure, sensitive, or "different" from their peers. There are serious implications if teachers do not recognize the signs of bullying on the student who appears to be different. Another way to help prevent children from being victims of bullies is to know the risk factors. Children who are the highest risk are those who cannot get along well with others, are unpopular, not popular; do not conform to social norms, and have low self-esteem. Failing to train the staff to identify and support these students could have damaging results.

While it was not noted during the interview process that school counselors had an enormous caseload, it was evident from literature and document analysis that the school counselors were given huge responsibilities. School leaders tend to assign school counselors as leaders of anti-bullying programs (Barnes, 2010). The counselors are trained to recognize and respond to students who bully and their victims, but oftentimes are not members of anti-bullying committee, but are assigned the work. Per the school counselors' job responsibilities; they are committed to serving students, while supporting parents, teachers, administrators and the community (American School Counselors Association, 2005). School counselors often times have a difficult time being proactive or recognizing problems in a timely manner, rather than simply responding to what comes their way. As such, there are strong implications for school leaders who fail to monitor the caseload of counselors particularly if they are responsible for ensuring the safety of students with disabilities in a bullying environment.

There are implications for families of students who engage in bullying behaviors and victims suffering from bullies. The review of literature focused on parenting styles,

parent/child relationship, and parent/school involvement as factors to decrease or avoid bullying behaviors. Understanding those behaviors by parents in addition to school stakeholders will lessen the chances of bullying behaviors in schools. There are implications for schools that failed to inform and train parents on anti-bullying behaviors. Bullies tend to have been bullied at some periods in their lives. According to the literature, between 1974 and 2000, there were 370,000 reported incidents of targeted school violence of people who have been bullied. If processes and programs are not in place for education stakeholders to implement bullying strategies or provide additional information, more students will become the victim.

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APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

School Counselors, Special Education Teachers, and Principals

1. Tell me about the nature of bullying at your school.

2. What happens when bullying is identified or detected in your school? What happens to bullies? Are they just punished, or are there interventions? How are victims supported? Please walk me through a few examples.

3. What policies and programs are in place to prevent bullying incidents, and do they align with a specific district or school policy regarding bullying? Do you think these could be improved, and if so, how?

4. Are you in position to deal with bullying issues? Who are the policy actors who matter most when it comes to reducing bulling in school?

5. What do you think can be done to address bullying situations that arise and to prevent bullying from happening?

6. Describe a typical target of bullies. Are any particular groups targeted by bullies?

7. What is the situation in your school with respect to students with disabilities and whether they have experienced bullying?

8. Are students with disabilities more or less likely to be bullied than nondisabled students?

Questions specific to Counselors and Special Education teachers

9. What can schools do more to address bullying situations of students with disabilities that arise and to prevent others from happening? Do you think principals would be receptive to that?

10. Do you feel that you are an anti-bullying leader, or do you depend on the guidance of your principal?

Questions specific to Principals

11. Did your professional training involve students with disabilities? Are you satisfied with the preparation you have received to deal with bullying? Why or why not?

12. What kind of professional development support do you think you would need in order to respond effectively to bullying of students with disabilities? Do you feel you can delegate anti-bullying leadership roles to counselors?

Final Question for all participants

13. How could the actors make a difference? What would they need to do differently?

APPENDIX B
POST SURVEY

This survey should take 5 to 10 minutes and should be completed eight weeks after you have participated in an in person interview with the researcher. This survey is voluntary and anonymous. As a participant, you are not required to answer any question you do not want to answer. The purpose of this research is to improve the preparation and leadership of counselors, special education teachers, and principals to prevent bullying of students with disabilities. You are being asked to participate in the study because you work in one of three randomly selected middle schools in the Olde English Consortium. This survey is being conducted by Sara Pearson, Doctoral Student at The University of South Carolina. Please contact me at 803.635.4607 if you have questions. As a participant in this research, you will receive a $10.00 Subway gift card. The gift card will be mailed to you through U.S. Postal Service once the survey is completed and returned to me through SurveyMonkey.

Rating

Using a scale of 1 to 5, rate your feelings about school bullying.

1. I feel confident that I can give students with disabilities who are bullied the support they need.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree

2. I feel confident that I can intervene effectively with students who bully others.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree

3. I can initiate appropriate policy responses to bullying incidents.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree

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4. I am part of a team in efforts to prevent bullying.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree

5. I have leadership responsibility in efforts to prevent bullying.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree

6. I feel more knowledgeable about ways to reduce bullying.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree

7. I feel more confident that I can make a difference to stop bullying.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree

8. I am more likely to seek out professional development on issues of bullying of SWD.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree

9. I have spoken to my principal about ways in which we reduce bullying.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree

10. I have taken new steps to reduce bullying of SWD. If agree or strongly agree, please explain.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree

APPENDIX C
CATEGORIES OF DISABILITIES

Students with disabilities make up a diverse group. While each student is unique in his/her own way, his/her disabilities and needs vary. The Individuals with Disability Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEIA 2004) identified 13 disability categories in which students may qualify as students with disabilities (as cited in Henderson, 2009, pp. 42 - 45). The thirteen disability categories and their descriptions are listed below:

1. *Autism* means a developmental disability which significantly affects verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age three. Characteristics often associated with autism are engaging in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to changes in daily routines or the environment, and unusual responses to sensory experiences [§300.8 (c)(1)(i)].

2. *Deaf-Blindness* means concomitant hearing and visual impairments, the combination of which causes such severe communication and other developmental and educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for children with deafness or children with blindness [§300.8(c)(2)].

3. *Deafness* means a hearing impairment so severe that a child is impaired in processing linguistic information through hearing, with or without amplification that adversely affects a child's educational performance [§300.8(c)(3)].

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4. *Emotional Disturbance* means a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics: (a) an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors; (b) an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers; (c) inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances; (d) a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; and (e) a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance [§300.8(c)(4)].

5. *Hearing Impairment* means an impairment in hearing, whether permanent or fluctuating, that adversely affects a child's educational performance included under the definition of "deafness" [§300.8 (c)(5)].

6. *Mental Retardation* means significantly sub average general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period that adversely affects an individual's educational performance [§300.8(c)(6)].

7. *Multiple Disabilities* mean concomitant impairments (such as mental retardation and blindness or mental retardation and orthopedic impairment), the combination of impairments causes such severe educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in a special education program solely for one of the impairments. The term does not include deaf-blindness.

8. *Orthopedic Impairment* means a severe orthopedic impairment that adversely affects an individual's educational performance. The term includes impairments caused by a

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congenital anomaly (e.g. absence of a limb), impairments caused by disease (e.g. bone cancer), and impairments from other causes (e.g. cerebral palsy, amputations, and fractures or burns that cause contractures) [§300.8(c)(8)].

9. *Other Health Impairment* means having limited strength, vitality, or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment, that is due to chronic or acute health problems such as asthma, attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, and sickle cell anemia; Tourette's syndrome; and adversely affects an individual's educational performance [§300.8(c)(9)].

10. *Specific Learning Disability* means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. The term does not include 45 learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage [§300.8(c)(10)].

11. *Speech or Language Impairment* means a communication disorder such as stuttering, impaired articulation, a language impairment, or voice impairment that adversely affects an individual's educational performance [§300.8(c)(11)].

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12. *Traumatic Brain Injury* means an acquired injury to the brain caused by an external physical force, resulting in total or partial functional disability or psychosocial impairment, or both, that adversely affects an individual's educational performance. The term applies to open or closed head injuries resulting in impairments in one or more areas such as cognition, language, memory, attention, reasoning, abstract thinking, judgment, physical functions, information processing, and speech. The term does not include brain injuries that are congenital or degenerative or brain injuries induced by birth trauma [§300.8(c)(12)].

13. *Visual Impairment* means impairment in vision that even with correction, adversely affects an individual's educational performance. The term includes both partial sight and blindness [§300.8(c)(13)].

APPENDIX D
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ALIGNMENTS

Research Questions	Interview Questions
1a	1. Tell me about the nature of bullying at your school.
1c	2. What happens when bullying is identified or detected in your school? What happens to bullies? Are they just punished, or are there interventions? How are victims supported? Please walk me through a few examples.
3	3. What policies and programs are in place to prevent bullying incidents, and do they align with a specific district or school policy regarding bullying? Do you think these could be improved, and if so, how?
1c	4. Are you in position to deal with bullying issues? Who are the policy actors who matter most when it comes to reducing bulling in school?
2a	5. What do you think can be done to address bullying situations that arise and to prevent bullying from happening?
1b	6. Describe a typical target of bullies. Are any particular groups targeted by bullies?
2b	7. What is the situation in your school with respect to SWD and whether they have experienced bullying?
3	8. Are SWD more or less likely to be bullied than nondisabled students?
1c	9. SWD are unable to communicate that they have a disability. Is there anyone prepared to recognize the signs? Why do you think this is the case? What do you think can be done about it?
1c	10. How are victims supported?
3	11. Who do you think has the greatest ability to reduce bullying in schools?
3	12. Are you satisfied with the preparation you have received to deal with bullying? If not, what kind of professional development would you need in order to respond effectively to bullying of SWD?

	Questions specific to Counselors and Special Education teachers
1c	13. What can schools do more to address bullying situations of SWD that arise and to prevent others from happening? Do you think principals would be receptive to that?
1c	14. Do you feel that you are an anti-bullying leader, or do you depend on the guidance of your principal?
	Questions specific to Principals and Counselors
3	15. Did your professional training involve SWD?
4	16. What kind of professional development support do you think you would need in order to respond effectively to bullying of SWD?
	Questions specific to Principals
3	16b. Do you feel you can delegate anti-bullying leadership roles to counselors?
	Final Question for all participants
4	17. How could the actors make a difference? What would they need to do differently?

	Principal Responses			Counselor Responses			SPED Teacher Responses		
1. I am confident that I can give SWD who are bullied the support they need.	SA	A	A	A	SA	SA	A	A	A
2. I am confident I can intervene effectively with students who bully others.	SA	A	A	A	SA	SA	A	A	SA
3. I can initiate proper policy responses to bullying incidents.	SA	SA	A	A	SA	SA	A	A	SA
4. I am part of a team in efforts to prevent bullying.	SA	SA	D	A	SA	SA	D	A	A
5. I have leadership responsibilities in efforts to prevent bullying.	SA	SA	SA	A	A	D	D	UD	A
6. I feel more knowledgeable about ways to reduce bullying.	SA	A	A	A	SA	A	D	UD	UD
7. I feel more confident that I can make a difference to stop bullying.	SA	SA	A	A	SA	D	A	A	A
8. I am more likely to seek out professional development on issues of bullying SWD.	SA	A	SA	A	SA	D	A	UD	UD
9. I have spoken to my principal about ways in which we reduce bullying.	SA	A	A	A	SA	D	SD	D	A
10. I have taken new steps to reduce bullying.	SA	A	A	A	SA	UD	D	UD	D
Overall Confidence In Bullying Policies and Responses	Agree (A)/ Strongly Agree (SA) (1.47)			Agree (A) (1.13)			Undecided (UD) Disagree (D) (0.5)		