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Effective Teaching and Behavioral Strategies Used by Exemplary Non-Public Alternative Education Schools

A Dissertation by

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Irvine, California

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

April 2018

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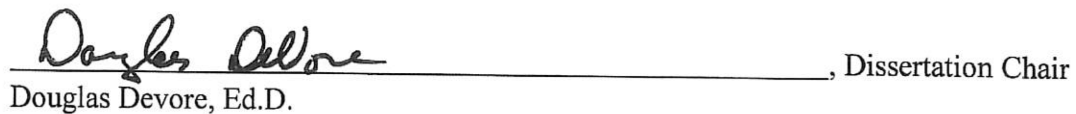

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ABSTRACT

Effective Teaching and Behavioral Strategies Used by Exemplary Non-Public Alternative Education Schools

by Alana Hughes

Purpose: The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore and describe the teaching and behavioral strategies exemplary, non-public alternative education schools used to support student learning as perceived by education specialists and site administrators at high-achieving, non-public alternative education schools in Los Angeles County, San Bernardino County, and Orange County.

Methodology: This qualitative case study examined the perception of education specialists and site administrators by conducting interviews to identify effective teaching and behavioral strategies used by exemplary non-public alternative education schools. The researcher interviewed nine education specialists and three site administrators from exemplary non-public alternative schools.

Findings: Data collected from the interviews indicated overall, education specialists and site administrators utilized an array of behavioral strategies in the educational environment. These included (1) consultation with a board-certified behavior analyst (BCBA), (2) incentive programs, and (3) behavior intervention plans. The teaching strategies utilized in the three exemplary alternative education settings included: (1) providing individual instruction, (2) modeling/peer modeling, (3) providing small group instruction, (4) building upon student interest, and (5) scaffolding.

Conclusions: Alternative education schools used various teaching and behavioral strategies. However, the researcher was unable to identify a significant amount of

common teaching strategies to support student learning. Although, all alternative education schools that participated in the study had a BCBA on staff, most schools failed to utilize only research-based strategies.

Recommendations: The recommendations from the qualitative case study include five essential components of an exemplary non-public alternative school: (1) develop accountability systems to monitor student learning and teaching practices, (2) provide on-going professional development on teaching and behavioral strategies for diverse learners, (3) implement effective teaching and behavioral strategies based on data collection, (4) scheduled regular consultations with a BCBA or individual who specializes in behavior, and (5) ensure the school employees are highly qualified staff members.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Alternative education schools continue to grow across the United States. Although they existed since the 1960s, few research findings support the effectiveness of these programs or document the total number of students served (Ahearn, 2004). Local education agencies (LEAs) often placed students with disruptive or severe behaviors in alternative educational settings in lieu of suspending them from class or expulsion (Vanderhaar, Munoz, & Petrosko, 2014). Amendments to the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) outlined the guidelines of when alternative education settings should be used and inadvertently spiked the development of these programs (Tobin & Sprague, 1999). IDEA provided provisions to ensure students with exceptional needs were placed in the least restrictive environment (LRE).

The philosophy, program design, and effectiveness of alternative education schools varied significantly (Fizzell & Raywid, 1997). Consequently, researchers struggled with evaluating the effectiveness of these programs due to the range of contrasting characteristics and heterogeneous populations. The most prevalent population of students enrolled in alternative education schools were returning dropouts; students with disabilities such as specific learning disabilities, other health impairments, autism, or emotional disabilities; and students with health risk behaviors (Zweig, 2003). Variation in programming and the population of students presented variables for the researcher to consider during the evaluation of effective alternative education programs.

Evidence supported the effectiveness of well- designed, comprehensive alternative education schools' positive impact on students categorized as at-risk (Morley, 1991; Raywid, 1996, 1998). However, it was unclear if the positive impact related to a

student's social emotional development, academic performance, or a combination of both. At-risk students are in danger of failing or dropping out of school (Alternbaugh, Engel, & Martin, 1995). Consequently, students categorized as at-risk included general education and special education students; thus, program design of each alternative education setting was typically tailored to a specific student population by using research-based practices (Tobin & Sprague, 1999).

Background

Alternative education is a term commonly used to define an array of alternative education settings such as charter schools, residential facilities, alternative learning centers, non-public schools, and magnet schools (Bullock, 2007). "Alternative education programs—broadly defined as educational activities that fall outside the traditional K–12 curriculum—frequently serve students who are at-risk of school failure" (Porowski, O'Conner, & Luo, 2014, p. 3). Many alternative education programs in California were certified by the California Department of Education (CDE) as non-public schools. According to CDE, 3,073 non-public schools currently operate in the state. Non-public schools are classified as private schools because they do not receive public funding nor adhere to accountability measures used to monitor student progress established in the public school setting.

History of Alternative Education Schools

Alternative education schools emerged in the educational landscape in the 1960s (Ahearn, 2004). Although initially only prevalent in the private sector, they quickly grew in the public sector in various communities. These schools were referred to simply as "alternatives." Urban alternative schools offered programs for minorities and low socio-

economic populations not successful in traditional schools (Raywid, 1999). In contrast, alternative schools in suburban areas primarily focused on progressive education, seeking more innovative ways to educate students. As a result of the early success of both types of alternative schools, they continued to grow to meet the various needs of students with special needs as well as the non-disabled general education population (Raywid, 1999).

According to McKee and Conner (2007), alternative schools arouse in the 1960s primarily to fight increasing bureaucracy and the depersonalization of public education by giving students more freedom and minimal adult supervision. In the 1980s, the purpose of alternative schools shifted to address the needs of at-risk students in danger of failing (McKee & Conner, 2007). Curriculum in these alternative settings was used to evoke and sustain an interest in learning. La Voulle (2016) stated,

> When teachers are committed to effective interdisciplinary practices, they use students' unique characteristics, background, prior experience, interests, and assets to make learning connections and demonstrate behaviors and attitudes that encourage and embrace cross-cultural understanding. Offering challenging but attainable cross-content and disciplinary literacy instructional activities. (p. 1)

Hence, teachers must have a fundamental understanding of the differences among their students to build upon their unique characteristics and make connections in learning. Culturally-sensitive curriculum primary focused on teaching the child and not merely the material (Leone & Drakeford, 1999). The instruction delivery model of culturally-sensitive curricula included the following options: (a) academically diverse instruction clarifying what the student must know that assesses background knowledge and clearly

defines the task, (b) multimodal text for linguistically diverse students, and (c) real world examples to access the learning of culturally diverse students (Gay, 2012).

Alternative schools focused on vocational skills through partnerships with businesses or local colleges were popular amongst students. These programs were designed to target student interest and learning styles for those who struggled in traditional school settings due to irrelevant or unstimulating content (Catterall & Stern, 1986). The sole purpose of such alternatives was to keep students in school and decrease dropout rates. The program design was more practical versus academically based and emphasized concrete learning opposed to abstract thinking (National Commission on Secondary Vocational Education, 1985).

The report from the National Center for Education (NCES; Kleiner, Porch, & Farris, 2002) compared the 3,850 alternative schools in 1998 to the 10,900 schools in 2002, suggesting an increase in the number of students placed in specialized programs. Findings indicated about 12% of all students in alternative schools and programs for at-risk students were special education students with individual education plans (Lehr & Lange, 2003).

Although data indicated students with special needs were placed and serviced assiduously in alternative education settings (Tobin & Sprague, 1999), uncertainties and questions remained regarding the quality of education students received. Due to the diverse population of students in terms of both ethnicity and disability, it was difficult to collect and study data in alternative education settings in a rigorous manner (Quinn & Poirier, 2006). Researchers agreed with some components that made schools effective (Quinn, Osher, Hoffman, & Hanley, 1998); however, disparity remains on the most

efficient way to match students with program designs that meet their needs (Dynarski & Gleason, 1998). In the absence of this information, educators may not be knowledgeable about various program designs of alternative programs, and consequently place students in these programs inappropriately.

Reforms and Legislation that Govern Alternative Education Schools

Historically, several education reforms resulted in state and federal legal mandates regarding alternative education (Ruzzi & Kraemer, 2006). In 1999, the Alternative Schools Accountability Model (ASAM) was developed to monitor the student performance in alternative programs. Due to the lack of federal funding, the model excluded significant accountability data. Still, an examination of the effectiveness of alternative education by monitoring the impact of accountability models was needed (Ruzzi & Kraemer, 2006).

State policymakers often used state-level performance-based accountability frameworks to make high-stakes decisions about students and schools (Cobb, 2004). In 2001, Congress reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, also known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), to include provisions for impoverished students. To improve student progress, the provisions of NCLB held all schools, including public alternative schools, accountable for meeting annual goals in core subject areas. Goals were determined by each school's performance on state testing and the overall projected progress for a school site. School districts that failed to meet established annual goals were subject to provisions to their federal funding, which included an increase in the percentage of funding allocated toward school improvement (Lee & Reeves, 2012).

Legislation defined alternative education for most states, yet the depth of those policies varied across states (Martin & Brand, 2006). In 2010, California adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for K-12 schools and provided guidelines for instruction in traditional and alternative education classes (LaVenia, Cohen-Vogel, & Lang, 2014). CCSS provided a clear set of standards for each grade level in English language arts and mathematics to help better prepare students for college, careers, and overall life experiences. Alternative education schools receive district funding to service students. For this reason, they use curriculum aligned with surrounding districts where the school is geographically located (Gagnon & McLaughlin, 2004).

President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) on December 10, 2015. The U.S. Department of Education (2015) reported ESSA requires all students be educated with high academic standards to prepare them for college and careers. Students placed in public alternative schools were required to receive instruction to meet the state adopted standards. Guidelines established by ESSA also require students to receive standards-based instruction designed to adequately prepare them for academic achievement, college, and career paths (Shoffner, 2016).

Alternative Education Program Designs

Alternative education programs were developed within and outside the public school system. Programs designed within the public school system offered alternatives such as flexible pacing, noncompetitive evaluation, and a child-centered approach (Lange & Sletton, 2002). Many times, these programs were referred to as continuation schools, specialized programs, magnet schools, or fundamental schools developed and operated by an LEA. Raywid (1995) found alternative programs could be categorized into three

distinct areas: progressive innovation (progressive education), last chance (alternative to suspensions and designed for at-risk youth), and remedial intervention (remediation and rehabilitation).

Progressive innovation. Progressive innovation alternative education schools sought to make education challenging, innovative, and fulfilling for all students (Raywid, 1995). These schools strived to reform schools from typical traditional or programmatic educational setting. Today, these schools serve as examples of restructured schools (Hawley, 1991). Magnet schools, those with an emphasize on a specific instructional strategy or programmatic theme, were considered exemplar examples of progressive innovation alternative schools.

Last chance. Last chance alternative programs were typically considered prior to or because of expulsion (Raywid, 1995). Programs included in-school suspensions, interim alternative educational settings, and longer-term placements such as residential school placements. They primarily focused on reshaping student behaviors opposed to pedagogy or modifying curriculum to make it accessible or appropriate for each student's learning style. Consequently, instruction usually mirrored traditional educational practices or merely provided basic skills through memorization and drills (Raywid, 1995).

Remedial intervention. Remedial intervention alternative programs were designed for students who required remediation or rehabilitation in academics and/or social emotional skill development (Raywid, 1995). The goal of these programs was to return students to comprehensive campuses within the district for mainstreaming

opportunities. For this reason, these programs emphasized social emotional development to build social competence and remedial work to strengthen basic skills (Raywid, 1995).

The goal for educators should be to develop similar remedial intervention programs within the district to return students to schools within their own community and recover district funding spent annually to fund such placements. Per Levenson (2012), some districts over-identified students with mild or moderate disabilities while underserving students categorized with moderate to severe disabilities. Often the moderate to severe population included students with autism, behavior, or cognitive impairment. This high-needs population continues to grow, requiring districts to develop programs or contract with an appropriate alternative education setting (Gregg, 1998).

Student Failure

Students were generally placed in alternative education programs when they required a specialized program to address their behavior or support other deficits due to their disability (Bullock, 2007). Yet, educators in alternative educational settings struggled to find and provide appropriate supports and enhancements for students. Hence, teachers were using various self-selected teaching methodologies and curricula that were not evidence based, and therefore lacked effective teaching and behavioral strategies (Bullock, 2007).

Although many alternative schools strive for the successful education of their students, negative images of alternative schools persisted (Jeong-Hee, 2011). Since the establishment of alternative schools in the educational arena, many viewed alternative education schools as dumping grounds or institutions for students with challenging behaviors. Consequently, many educators continued to hold negative perceptions of

these institutions and struggled with clearly defining their contributions and role in the educational system (Raywid, 1994).

Consequently, alternative schools were viewed as warehouses, dumping grounds, continuation schools, or merely a last resort to provide educational benefit to students outside of the traditional school setting (Jeong-Hee, 2011). The terms *dumping ground* and *warehouse* stemmed from what B. Clark (1968) referred to as "cooling-out," or social messages that encouraged students to lower their expectations and recognize the alternate option provided for them was normal and acceptable. As students who attended alternative programs were already at a high risk for social exclusion, educators must be knowledgeable about the continuum of placements to prevent further potential harmful effects of alternative school settings (Snow, 2009). Despite the negative perceptions, educators must examine the characteristics of each potential placement to ensure all students are appropriately placed. Although some alternative education schools continue to meet the needs of at-risk students, others require the development of an organized framework to identify essential elements to better meet student needs (Leone & Drakeford, 1999).

Theoretical Framework

Characteristics of Effective Alternative Education Programs

Alternative education programs developed their philosophy, structure, and goals based on the population of students they intended to service. The characteristics of alternative education programs varied and were generally determined by the geographic location, available funding, politics, and school culture (Tobin & Sprague, 1999). One common thread in philosophies guiding alternative education was the belief that

traditional school settings were broken and ineffective, failing to meet the diverse learning needs of youth today (Fizzell & Raywid, 1997). For that reason, the characteristics and design of the alternative education school were instrumental in fostering a child's growth in competence, independence, responsibility, and respect (Quinn & Poirier, 2006).

The research did not provide strong evidence to support claims of effective characteristics and a correlation with student achievement (Aron, 2006). However, the literature suggested a framework of characteristics demonstrated by effective alternative education programs (Aron & Zweig, 2003). Despite variation in overall goals, philosophies, and structure, common characteristics and components of alternative education programs included guidance counseling, social skill development, life skill instruction, and transitional planning and career readiness (Gutherson, Davies, & Daszkiewicz, 2011).

Positive Behavior Intervention Supports

The use of positive behavior intervention supports (PBIS) was another important factor when servicing students with behavioral problems and social skill deficits (Morrissey, Bohanon, & Fenning, 2010). To proactively address challenging behaviors and improve implementation of appropriate behavior interventions, schools increasingly showed an interest in the implementation of the universal level of PBIS (Bradshaw, Goldweber, Rosenberg, & Leaf, 2012). PBIS is a three-tiered intervention program that encourages positive responses to behavior school-wide by analyzing practices and processes, and utilizing data to assist with the development of a positive school culture (Morrissey et al., 2010).

The three-tiered model emphasizes problem solving techniques, with the objective of discontinuing the undesired behavior and using positive reinforcement to support the use of more socially appropriate behaviors (Office of Special Education Programs [OSEP], 2009). Tier 1 is universal behavior intervention for all students. Tier 2 is designed to provide extra behavioral support for some students. Tier 3 provides more intensive, individual behavioral support. Fundamentally, PBIS provides a range of behavior interventions that can be systematically applied based on student needs (OSEP, 2009).

Effective Teaching Strategies

Specialized programs such as alternative schools required different levels of engagement from the teachers (Dyson & Plunkett, 2012). Alternative school teachers encountered various challenges with examining the core of learning and teaching itself. Gore (2001) articulated this effectively by suggesting the key emphasis ought to be on the students and what they personally gained from a learning experience. These practices were consistent with progressive education pedagogy. The Progressive Education Network (2014) described this pedagogy as education that supported children both as learners and as citizens, and promoted diversity, equity, and justice in schools and society. Moreover, these learning experiences provided an opportunity for students to learn interdependence (Progressive Education Network, 2014).

McKee and Conner (2007) argued that alternative schools should be held to the same standards as traditional schools regarding accountability for student performance. In agreement with Raywid (2001), students at-risk of failing required a good education beyond what was required for students who managed to succeed under any circumstance,

including the most challenging. Highlighting the importance of effective teaching and behavioral strategies was paramount when working with students with learning disabilities. Swanson and Hoskyn (1998) conducted an experimental study of successful teaching strategies effective for students with disabilities across core content areas and identified the following instructional features as effective for all students: (a) combining strategy and direct teaching, (b) controlling the complexity of the task (multiple steps vs. single-step instructions), (c) using small conjoined groups, and (d) using responses and student inquiry.

Teaching Strategies

Methods used to support learning desired course content were referred to as teaching strategies. A needs assessment of students or group needs helped teachers identify the most appropriate teaching strategies (Galloway, Armstrong, & Tomlinson, 2013). After analyzing target learners, teachers could modify instruction and adapt materials to incorporate teaching strategies. Good teaching involved helping students develop strong background knowledge that was easily recalled and accessible. According to Rosenshine (2012), the following were successful research-based teaching strategies: (1) offering short reviews of previous lessons; (2) presenting new lessons in small steps; (3) asking questions and checking responses; (4) providing models; (5) guiding student practice; (6) checking for student understanding; (7) obtaining high success rates; (8) providing scaffolds; (9) monitoring independent practice; and (10) conducting weekly and monthly reviews.

Statement of the Research Problem

The goal of providing the best education for all American children prompted an increase in educational research and experimentation throughout the second half of the 20th century (Lange & Sletten, 2002). Current research provided insight on integral supports for at-risk students placed in alternative schools, but failed to provide any merit to these programs based on student achievement levels. Quinn and Rutherford (1998) identified several factors beneficial to at-risk students in alternative education environments, such as dedicated, well-trained staff, effective curriculum, and supports/service provided in collaboration with other agencies.

Recent data collected from national surveys estimated about 12% of all students in alternative schools had disabilities (Kleiner et al., 2002). Yet, little is known about the nature of the instructional programs offered, special education processes, accountability practices, or outcomes for these students (Lehr & Lange, 2003). Despite the absence of research-based effective practices, there was a nation-wide increase in alternative schools. Although they existed in the educational landscape for decades, there continues to be insufficient research findings to document their effectiveness and actual student population (Ahearn, 2004).

Notable differences exist between alternative programs and traditional schools. Alternative programs offer new learning models, such as hands-on or multi-sensory curricula. The curricula and schedules were designed to target student learning styles and social-emotional needs (Farris-Berg, Schroeder, Kolderie, & Graba, 2003). This mindset embraced the whole child and tailored instruction to individual learning styles. These

attributes were similar to the theories undergirding progressive education and the primary purpose of alternative education (Raywid, 1995).

New legislation sparked an interest in alternative education schools. With the enactment of ESSA, LEAs were tasked with ensuring instructional practices included high academic standards to prepare students for college and careers (Kleiner et al., 2002). For that reason, it was important to examine teaching and behavioral strategies within the alternate educational setting. This research sought to describe teaching and behavioral strategies used by exemplary non-public alternative education schools.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore and describe the teaching and behavioral strategies exemplary, non-public alternative education schools used to support student learning as perceived by education specialists and site administrators at high-achieving, non-public alternative education schools in Los Angeles County, San Bernardino County, and Orange County.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What teaching strategies support student learning as perceived by education specialists and site administrators at exemplary non-public alternative education schools in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Orange Counties?
2. What behavioral strategies support student learning as perceived by education specialists and site administrators at exemplary non-public alternative education schools in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Orange Counties?

Significance of the Problem

The alternative education field lacks a common definition and has a major divide between the differing philosophies of alternative programs; little empirical evidence is available to identify the components necessary to create effective alternative educational programs (Quinn, Poirier, Faller, Gable, & Tonelson, 2006). This qualitative case study sought to examine alternative education programs and develop a common definition inclusive of strategies conducive to a universal description of effective alternative education settings.

The growth of alternative schools in many states raised questions about their characteristics and use (Lehr & Lange, 2003). The drastic increase nationwide prompted a heightened awareness and interest in these programs among educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders. Findings from a recent national survey estimated 10,900 public alternative schools and programs for at-risk students were operating in the United States in 2000-01 (Kleiner et al., 2002). This survey also indicated 12% of all students enrolled in such programs were classified as at-risk or special needs with individual education plans (IEPs; Kleiner et al., 2002).

The U.S. Department of Education (2015) reported that one requirement of ESSA was “that all students in America be taught to high academic standards that will prepare them to succeed in college and careers” (para. 6). As a result, ESSA is affecting special education students currently placed in alternative school settings. Hence, a notable research topic would be to investigate the effectiveness of these programs and the quality of their instruction.

The findings from this qualitative case study could be valuable to educators and other stakeholders in a continuous commitment to student success as outlined in new ESSA. Additionally, the results advanced the research on alternative schools and highlighted the fundamental components of effective alternative schools. The study identified the effective teaching and behavioral strategies in successful alternative schools in three different counties. Data were calibrated to develop a checklist of effective strategies and evidence-based practices. Educators and other stakeholders should use this resource to determine the credibility of proposed alternative education settings. Moreover, the study could set a precedent for alternative schools that continue to grow in numbers across the county.

Definitions

The following definitions were used to develop a common understanding of terms used throughout this study.

Alternative Education Program. Broadly defined as educational and instructional activities outside the traditional public K-12 curriculum (Porowski et al., 2014).

At-risk Student. A "term used to describe students or groups of students who are considered to have a higher probability of failing academically or dropping out of school" (Great Schools, 2013, para 1).

Behavior Intervention Plan. A proactive action plan, based on a functional behavior assessment, used to address maladaptive behavior impeding learning of the student or others.

Behavioral Strategies. Evidence- or research-based methods, approaches, and interventions that seek to prompt and control student behavior.

Board Certified Behavior Analysis. A board-certified individual trained to provide services and supervise behavior analysts.

Comprehensive Campus. A school site offering a range of programs that meet the needs of a diverse group of students.

Coping Skills. Ways in which people manage and deal with various stressors.

Core Curriculum. Basic subject areas required as part of a comprehensive educational program and required for high school graduation, such as mathematics, English Language Arts, fine arts, science, and history.

Education Specialists. Credentialed special education teachers authorized by the Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) to instruct students with mild-to-moderate disabilities.

Evidence-Based Practices. Practices deemed effective and successful based on extensive and rigorous research.

Exemplary Alternative Education Schools. Alternative education schools that provide programs that improve student academic, behavioral, and social development.

Inclusion. An educational approach in which students with special needs learn in an educational setting with their non-disabled peers for a percentage or entire school day.

Interpersonal Skills. Skills used to communicate and interact appropriately with others, also referred to as people skills.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). The learning environment in which a student with disabilities should have to be educated with non-disabled peers to the greatest extent appropriate, including access to the general education curriculum or any other program that non-disabled peers would be able to access. (IDEA, 2004).

Non-Public School. Private, nonsectarian schools designed to support at-risk youth who demonstrated academic, behavioral, and social deficits and were unsuccessful in traditional school settings.

Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS). A multi-tiered approach to addressing student behavioral needs school-wide for all students to achieve social, emotional, and academic success (Morrissey et al., 2010).

Research-Based Strategies. Programs that withstand the test of standard scientific testing practices (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Site Administrator. The principal or lead administrator at a school who supervises and monitors the teaching staff, among other duties such as curriculum development.

Social-Emotional Learning. Strategies that enhance student capacity to integrate skills, attitudes, and behaviors to cope effectively and ethically with daily tasks and challenges.

Social Skills. Skills for facilitating interactions and communication with others.

Social Competence. "Social competence is the condition of possessing the social, emotional, and intellectual skills and behaviors needed to succeed as a member of society" (Encyclopedia of Children's Health, n.d., para. 1)

Specialized Academic Instruction (SAI). A way of delivering instructional services to students with disabilities as describe in the their IEP.

Specialized Programs. Programs designed for students with special needs that tailor the structure and characteristics of the program toward a specific population.

Teaching Strategies. Instructional methods used to target various learning modalities, such as visual, auditory, and kinesthetic.

Specific Learning Disability. "A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using language…that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations" (IDEA, 2004, Section 602).

Delimitations

This study was delimited to non-public alternative education schools certified by the California Department of Education and operating in Los Angeles, Orange, or San Bernardino Counties. Additionally, the study was delimited to teachers at these schools working with students in grades 4 through 8.

Organization of the Study

In summary, Chapter I reviewed the history of alternative education schools and how they evolved. The researcher also stated the purpose and significance of this case study. Chapter II takes an in-depth look at current research on characteristics of effective alternative education schools, with an emphasize on teaching and behavioral strategies. Chapter III presents the methodology of the study, population, and methods used to collect and analyze data. Chapter IV outlines the findings and themes. Chapter V discuss the findings in terms of the research questions. This chapter also presents conclusions, recommendations, and suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The researcher conducted a review of the literature regarding the teaching strategies and instructional practices used by high achieving, non-public alternative education schools. As part of this literature review, the researcher developed a synthesis matrix (Appendix A) to support a review of key literature. The following literature review is divided into five main components: (a) evolution of alternative education, (b) characteristics of alternative schools, (c) progressive discipline, (d) instructional strategies of alternative education settings, and (e) the role of alternative education programs to meet the unique needs of at-risk students.

Research for this study included an in-depth review of the effective alternative program designs. The researcher examined characteristics of effective alternative programs and research-based strategies used in these settings. Data suggested students served by comprehensive, well-designed alternative programs performed better than anticipated (Morley, 1991; Raywid, 1998). Accordingly, the literature review explored various designs that provide a meaningful alternative to traditional settings.

Alternative Education

Alternative education programs were broadly defined as educational activities that deviated from traditional educational programs in that they generally served students at risk of failure (Porowski et al., 2014). Most states authorized and legislated education programs, services, and options considered “alternative” (Lange & Sletten, 2002). In 1998, 20 states had adopted a definition of alternative education (Katsiyannis & Williams, 1998). By 2002, 48 states had passed legislation for alternative education

(Porowski et al., 2014). Nevertheless, a great deal of disparity still exists regarding how to clearly define alternative education.

Alternative education programs vary in program design and the population of students served. Each state, or in some cases school district, defined and determined the design of alternative education programs, including target populations, settings, services, and structures, which attributed to the variation across programs (Lehr, Moreau, Lange, & Lanners, 2004). As such, the design, philosophy, and effectiveness of alternative education programs varied significantly (Fizzell & Raywid, 1997). The unique characteristics and diverse population in each setting made it virtually impossible to impose a uniform evaluation of alternative programs. According to Kim and Taylor (2008), despite variations in state definitions, most agreed alternative education programs were designed to meet the academic, emotional, and behavioral needs of students who were not successfully served in traditional schools.

History of Alternative Education Programs

Young (1990) asserted alternative education schools existed since the birth of American education. Educational opportunities based on race, gender, and social class set the stage for variation in alternative programs and the evolution of the educational system. Regardless of the origin, the roots of modern day programs derived from the civil rights movement (Young, 1990).

The educational system was highly criticized in the late 1950s and early 1960s as biased in its approach and thus ensuring the success of select students (Lange & Sletton, 2002). Raywid (1981) described schools as “cold, dehumanizing, irrelevant institutions, largely indifferent to the humanity and the ‘personhood’ of those within them” (p. 551).

During this time, many critics of the public school system argued excellence was "solely in narrow cognitive terms at the expense of equity" (Young, 1990, p. 9). Consequently, inequity was created in the public school system because of its inability to design programs to meet various learning modalities and unique student needs (Young, 1990).

Inequality across schools triggered the impetus for reform of public education and the birth of alternative education. A gradual transformation of public education occurred with increased emphasis on standards, accountability, and excellence (Leone & Drakeford, 1999). Various stakeholders, such as legislatures, school boards, and parents, advocated for higher achievement levels for students. Concerns about school safety and discipline simultaneously rose among stakeholders (Dwyer, Osher, & Warger, 1998; Furlong, Morrison, & Dear 1994). As a result, a series of reports and task force recommendations for reform (e.g., A Nation at Risk [National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983]; A Nation Prepared [Carnegie Forum, 1986]) targeted raising education standards and graduation requirements, and lowering the tolerance for challenging behaviors. Although the recommendations were designed to assist college-bound students, non-college-bound students struggling with the traditional school setting and culture were overlooked (Smith, 1988).

Traditional school settings tended to adopt zero tolerance, which affected at-risk students. It was estimated that over 80% of the nation's schools had zero tolerance policies (Gagnon & McLaughlin, 2004). Although districts' implement policies to maintain safe learning environments, the adverse effect of such policies failed to improve student behaviors. According to Skiba and Peterson (2003), some school practices and policies remained consistent for 200 years, with no significant changes in consideration

of the current school climate. Consequently, they engaged in a more punitive approach to addressing behaviors, such as strict discipline and negative consequences (Lassen, Steele, & Sailor, 2006; Sugai & Horner, 2002). Some zero tolerance policies included expulsion, suspension, or referrals to outside agencies such as non-public schools or residential facilities that service at-risk students with challenging and disruptive behaviors. Nearly 56% of referrals for placement in alternative settings were completed by someone other than the parent or student (Lehr & Lange, 2003).

Need for Alternative Settings

Despite several interventions used in traditional settings to support student behaviors, a small percentage of students require more intensive Tier 3 supports (Martinez, 2009). Tier 3 supports were designed to meet individual student needs, which could involve transitioning a student to an alternative setting. For this reason, school district personnel must use alternative programs that implement effective strategies and practices (Martinez, 2009). Research showed at-risk students were more successful in comprehensive, well-designed alternative programs than anticipated (Morley, 1991).

In recent years, the number of youth engaging in dangerous behaviors increased (Tobin & Sprague, 1999). This population of students would fall within the Tier 3 category of interventions. In the early 1990s, approximately 450,000 delinquent youth were referred to detention centers and 300,000 incarcerated (Leone, Rutherford, & Nelson, 1991). Consequently, concerns about funding juvenile facilities increased and many stakeholders tasked schools and outside agencies with developing alternative education programs (Dryfoos, 1997).

Legal Considerations

IDEA (2004) mandated schools to use alternative education strategies for students struggling with general education demands. Disciplinary removals from school for more than 10 days in one academic school year were required a manifestation determination meeting (Ed. Code 48900), or functional behavioral assessment (FBA), if the behavior triggered a change in placement. During the manifestation determination meeting, the team reviewed the student's current IEP, psycho-educational assessment, and any evaluations conducted by related service providers to determine if the IEP was implemented with fidelity and if the behavior the student engaged in was a manifestation of the student's disability. If the team concludes the behavior was a manifestation of the student's disability, all progressive discipline was stopped (IDEA, 2004).

If a student engaged in a severe behavior, school personnel could elect to place the student in an interim alternative education setting (CDE, n.d.). Serious behaviors were described as: (1) in possession of a dangerous weapon, (2) drug offenses, and (3) causing serious bodily harm (CDE, n.d.). Centers for Disease Control (1994) reported students not attending school had a greater likelihood to carry weapons, use drugs, engage in physically aggressive behaviors, and be sexually active. Disciplinary practices like suspension and expulsion attributed to negative student behaviors by excluding them from school.

Alternative education settings such as non-public schools and community day school were often used for interim alternative educational settings (IAES). Placement in IAES did not require parent consent and lasted 45 days in duration (Center of Health Statistics, 1999). Students could be placed in an IAES setting, without parent consent, if

they engaged in the following behaviors: causing serious bodily harm, bringing a weapon to school, or possessing drugs at school. Students could be referred to an alternative education setting from local schools, voluntary enrollment from parents, or as a requirement of an IAES. General education students were also considered for alternative programs for engaging in behaviors such as attempted suicide (Center of Health Statistics, 1999). Successful alternative education strategies were found effective for students at risk for dropping out (Altenbaugh et al., 1995).

Need for Alternative Education Programs

Providing a safe learning environment inclusive of consistent and impartial disciplinary practices remains a primary responsibility of school administrators (Quinn et al., 1998; Wooten, 2015). Without effective disciplinary practices, students were set up for failure or imprisonment (James & Freeze, 2006). Improved disciplinary practices included implementing PBIS (Flannery, Fenning, Kato, & McIntosh, 2014), rethinking zero tolerance policies (Martinez, 2009), adopting more proactive policies to address behaviors (Sugai & Horner, 2002), and developing effective alternative education programs (Sable, Plotts, & Mitchell, 2010).

Over the past decade, various reasons resulted in an increased need for alternative education programs, including: more students requiring specialized instruction, more students demonstrating impulsive behaviors, hyperactive behavior, advancements in the screening process, and increased drug usage (Lusby, 2005). Jackson and Marshall (1983) conceded the need for alternative education was evident and became a viable option for America's public schools. Alternative programs "are appropriate for a very small

number of students who are highly disruptive or are dangerous to themselves or others" (Alternative Schools, 1999, p. 3).

Common Characteristics of Alternative Education Programs

Alternative education programs varied greatly, but some common characteristics were supported by the literature (Tobin & Sprague, 1999). Many alternative education schools based the program on the characteristics of community, such as local needs, available funding, student population, and school culture (Tippecanoe Youth, 2001). A variety of alternative education programs were designed to service a wide range of students (Mack, 1992; Pilat, 1996).

The alternative education setting could be embedded on a comprehensive campus, using a school-within-a-school model or a self-contained classroom, or operate at a separate site (Raywid, 1999). Examples of programs offered at other sites include continuation schools, non-public schools, community day schools, and residential facilities (Aron, 2006).

Alternative education programs often provided more options to students than traditional public schools. Alternative education programs offered a path to receiving high school diplomas, general education diplomas (GEDs), certificates of completion, or occupational certification, exceeding options available in a traditional educational setting (Cable, Plucker, & Spradlin, 2009). Moreover, transitional planning offered by alternative education programs was considered instrumental in preparing students for adulthood (James-Gross, 2006; Kerka, 2003). Alternative education evolved to provide a continuum of services and options for students with varying circumstances, interests, and abilities (Lange & Sletten, 2002). Other alternative education options included

counseling and guidance, social skill development, life skill instruction, and career readiness (Porowski et al., 2014).

Counseling and guidance. School counselors were charged with supporting the growth and overall success of all students (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2011, 2012). Students placed in alternative settings were no exception to the rule. Yet, many counselors received limited training in working in alternative education settings, especially those designed for students with disciplinary problems (Downs, 1999). Students placed in alternative education settings designed for disciplinary problems presented diverse mental health needs. Typically, students were expelled from their home school for engaging in behaviors such as substance abuse, inappropriate behavior, and violent behaviors (Foley & Pang, 2006). Additionally, students demonstrated more suicidal tendencies than students in traditional schools (Lehr et al., 2004).

Counseling programs in alternative education settings needed to be based on a needs assessment, established counseling standards, and most importantly, each student's individual needs (Mullen & Lambie, 2013). Effective programs were inclusive of individual and group counseling sessions. Accordingly, program designs included practical counseling interventions as a foundation to promote the holistic development of students, with an emphasize on identified student needs (ASCA, 2012). In the event student needs could not be met in the alternative education settings, school counselors referred students to other professionals or outside agency resources, such as BCBAs, school resource officers, school psychologists, or mental health agencies (J. Walker, Shenker, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2010).

Social skill development. Deficits in social skills significantly contributed to school failure and poor vocational outcomes (Carver & Lewis, 2010; H. Walker et al., 1998). To increase employability and develop responsible members of the community, 13 states included legislative language in support of social skill development and life skills (Porowski et al., 2014). Social skill development was considered an essential component of alternative education programs (Tobin & Sprague, 1999). Social skills were often taught in small group settings and generalized in the natural learning environment to demonstrate mastery. Important elements of social skill instruction included: (a) interpersonal problem-solving, (b) conflict resolution, and (c) anger management (Webster-Stratton, Reid, & Hammond, 2004).

Interpersonal problem-solving. Children who exhibited hyperactive, impulsivity, and inattentive behaviors were at risk of having cognitive deficits in interpersonal problem-solving (Dodge & Crick, 1990). Students lacking interpersonal problem-solving skills perceived social situations as hostile, and in turn, curtailed prosocial responses. Additionally, they lacked understanding of the consequences of their aggressive behavior. Webster-Stratton et al. (2004) suggested, "There is evidence that children who employ appropriate problem-solving strategies play more constructively, are better liked by their peers, and are more cooperative at home and school" (p. 107).

Conflict resolution. The objective of conflict resolution was to instill problem-solving skills in children. Conflicts could arise in various locations and students often expressed their emotions in the form of teasing, gossip, and aggressive behavior. Moreover, the inability to handle confrontational situations resulted in acts of violence in schools and communities (Olive, 2006). Conflict resolution involved allowing both

parties to hear each other's point of view and develop acceptable solutions (Jones & Kmitta, 2001). Teaching healthy ways to resolve conflict peacefully decreased incidents of violence and criminal misconduct (S. Miller, 1994).

Anger management. Involves one's ability to control aggression and impulsive responses that interfere with developing and maintaining friendships (Larson & Lochman, 2002). Without training, students struggled with on-going peer rejection and social problems well into adulthood (Cole, 1990). In addition, students tended to lack self-regulatory skills required to engage in problem-solving that resulted in positive outcomes (H. Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1995). Further, evidence suggested aggressive children misinterpreted ambiguous situations as hostile or threatening (Dodge & Cole, 1987; H. Walker et al., 1995). Anger management training through alternative education programs helped students learn how to control impulsive behaviors and better interpret social situations.

Life skill instruction. Millions of individuals with learning disabilities were excluded from meaningful employment due to life skill deficits essential to job functioning (Goodship, 1990). Up to 72% of individuals with disabilities were unemployed (Butterworth et al., 2011). Life skills must be embedded within instruction for students with special needs (Browder, Spooner, Wakeman, Trela, & Baker, 2006). As reported by Brolin (1993), life skills were essential for independent living and included a wide range of skills, such as proper grooming and dressing, appropriate table manners, basic financial management, and use of public transportation. To help students be gainfully employed and function independently as responsible adults, curriculum for life

skills should integrated into academics, along with daily living skills, personal/social, and occupational skills (Bobzien, 2014).

Transitional planning and career readiness. IDEA (2004) stated schools must provide specific transition plans for students with disabilities, which must be in place by age 16 as part of the student's IEP. The terms transitional education and career readiness were often used interchangeably because of similarities in activities/instruction and the overall objectives of preparing students for life beyond school (Porowski et al., 2014). Alternative education settings provided flexibility to ensure students were afforded opportunities for instruction in career readiness (Cable et al., 2009). Additionally, transitional education included community based instruction, job training, and vocational education, which increased the likelihood of generalization (Schaefer & Rivera, 2012).

GED diplomas. One objective of Common Core State Standards (CCSS; 2010) was for educators and other stakeholders to provide curriculum and instruction that gave students the skills necessary to graduate from high school, obtain and succeed in entry-level positions in the workforce, and enroll in credit-bearing college courses. President Obama (2009) shared that, "three-quarters of the fastest-growing occupations require more than a high school diploma" (p. 7). Despite the current entry-level requirements, an estimated 1.2 million students neglected to receive a high school diploma or its equivalency (Wahlberg, 2013). Statistical data indicated failure to complete high school had long-term financial costs and impacted both the community and individual (Tavakolian, 2012).

Students placed in alternative placements remained within the jurisdiction of the local school district until the age of 18 or completion of 12th grade (Gutherson, 2011).

Consistent progress toward grade level standards and completion of classes comparable to traditional settings enabled students to earn a diploma. Students unable to meet the requirements for a high school diploma could elect to attend classes in preparation for the GED test (Frey, 2017).

Progressive Discipline in Alternative Education

To create a safe learning environment for all students and staff, traditional schools engaged in progressive discipline. Progressive discipline included the principal or administrators review of appropriate consequences and/or supports to help students improve their behavior, while considering their individual circumstances (Fenning et al., 2008). The goal of progressive discipline was to ensure no reoccurrence of negative behaviors. Schools that practiced progressive discipline consider the students' stage of growth and development, the nature and severity of the behavior, and the impact of the behavior on the school climate, which in many cases resulted in the student's transfer to an alternative education program (Gregg, 1998).

As higher expectations and standards were implemented, non-college-bound students struggled with new approaches and school districts developed alternative education programs for students that continued to disrupt the learning environment (Leone & Drakeford, 1999). These alternative schools were referred to as *last chance* options for youth (Raywid, 1995). Despite that last chance options were a punitive response to behavioral difficulties, their ultimate goal was to provide a positive, proactive response to the individual needs of students (Leone & Drakeford, 1999).

Some researchers argued zero tolerance policies negligently increased behavior problems among students (Luiselli, Putnam, Handler, & Feinberg, 2005). Alternatively,

considerable evidence showed positive behavior supports were more appropriate approaches with at-risk students (Lassen et al., 2006). Alternative programs were designed for a specific population of students by tailoring the supports to meet the needs of at-risk students, and customarily implemented positive behavior interventions (Cable et al., 2009). A national survey reported 64% of districts had at least one alternative program designed to service at-risk students; these programs served 646,500 students in the United States during the 2007-08 academic school year (Carver & Lewis, 2010)

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)

Legislation provided guidelines for students with disabilities that mandated access to the general education setting in the least restrictive environment (IDEA, 2004). Yet students were consistently suspended, expelled, and placed in alternative settings. Research indicated disabled students achieved at higher levels in general education settings and were not detrimental to their non-disabled peers, despite the challenges for teachers (Idol, 2006). General education teachers without special education training now serve special needs students with increased intensive instruction, social-emotional, and behavioral needs (Morrissey et al., 2010). Consequently, general education teachers were more anxious about serving special needs students in the absence of more comprehensive techniques for behavior management (Morrissey et al., 2010).

Previously, disciplinary actions were reactionary with increasingly punitive consequences. Trivial, severe behaviors led to expulsions and suspensions (Skiba & Rausch, 2006). Also, suspensions were used in minor incidents, such as excessive absenteeism (Skiba & Knesting, 2001; Vavrus & Cole, 2002). Further, suspensions had a negative impact on student achievement and school outcomes (Wooten, 2015). An

analysis of disciplinary policies discovered many were punitive in nature and few applied positive measures (Fenning et al., 2008). Although many agreed policies were needed to address crime, violence, and misbehavior in schools, current practices were ineffective for students with and without disabilities (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2003). Schools needed to adopt more positive interventions to approach discipline and one alternative was PBIS (Sugai, Flannery, & Bohanon-Edmonson, 2005).

Overview of PBIS

Willoughby (2013) challenged educators to assess disciplinary methods more closely by determining if the consequence would promote educational opportunities or exclude students from such opportunities. Educators were asked to determine how the consequence impacted the student and adjust their choice of discipline accordingly to foster learning opposed to exclusionary practices. PBIS was a proactive approach to addressing challenging student behaviors (Willoughby, 2013).

PBIS is a system wide process that includes all staff members as well as parents and community members (Carr et al., 2002). PBIS uses a three-tiered system. Tier 1 represented a schoolwide system designed to support about 80% of the overall student population (Carney, 2005). Tier 2 supports were used with about 15% of the study body and provided a more intense level of support. Tier 3 was the most intensive and individualized, and intended to be used with about 5% of the population (Carney, 2005).

Tier 1 Positive Behavior Supports

According to Morrissey (2010), seven components characterized a successful schoolwide Tier 1 model: commitment, formation of a representative team, examination

of behaviors, behavioral expectations, systemic direct teaching, consistent clarification of procedures, and progress monitoring.

Commitment. Changing the culture of schools requires commitment and buy-in from the staff. The traditional approach to behavior was punitive and reactive to challenging behaviors (Osher, Bear, Sprague, & Doyle, 2010). PBIS introduced a proactive approach that involved all the faculty and staff to changing their mindset and approach to develop disciplinary procedures (Morrissey et al. 2010).

Formation of a representative team. Implementation of PBIS started with developing a PBIS team (Simonsen & Sugai, 2013). The PBIS team conducted a needs assessment of behavioral problems at the school through interviews, observations, and review of discipline data. The purpose of examining the data was to look for patterns of problem behaviors and develop replacement behaviors based on the teams' findings and decision-making process. Teams used a problem-solving process and three to five positive behaviors as guidelines to addressing behaviors (Simonsen & Sugai, 2013).

Examine behaviors. Office referrals were one type of data examined by the PBIS team (Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997). Referrals included data on disruptive, off-task, and uncooperative behaviors. The team's task was to identify the patterns of behavior and establish positive replacement behaviors (Tobin, Sugai, & Colvin, 1996).

Behavioral expectations. After the team reviewed the behavioral data, they developed schoolwide expectations enforced throughout the campus by all staff members (OSEP, 2002). An example of a behavioral expectation was teaching students the importance of respect. The expectations were taught explicitly to the entire student body (Bohanon-Edmonson, Flannery, Sugai, & Eber, 2005).

Systematic direct teaching. Assemblies, video presentations, and classroom instruction were considered vital options to introduce the adopted expectations (Sprague & Perkins, 2009). Expectations were posted in school hallways and visible in the classroom for easy reference. The instructional day could be modified to include direct instruction of the schoolwide expectations. Workshops were another notable alternative for students and staff (Sprague & Perkins, 2009).

Consistent clarification of procedures. Within the PBIS framework, replacement behaviors were explicitly taught with consistent prompting and positive reinforcement (Sidman, 2006). Posters in the classrooms or hallways were friendly reminders to students of the established expectations. Random student recognition also served as a positive reinforcement for using replacement behaviors and following the rules. Level systems, token economies, and ticket systems were examples of positive reinforcement and provide consistent clarification of procedures (Sidman, 2006).

Monitor progress and interventions. To ensure students made consistent progress toward goals and interventions were effective, staff must monitor PBIS implementation (Sugai, Sprague, Horner, & Walker, 2000). Modifications to interventions were made when data were indicative of ineffective interventions. In addition, monitoring progress helped staff identify and acknowledge milestones in student behaviors (Sugai et al., 2000). Adjustments could also be made to lesson plans regarding age appropriateness and the format for teaching expectations (Gage, Scott, Hirn, & MacSuga-Gage, 2017).

Overall, research showed PBIS resulted in decreased office referrals (NCES, 2010). Baseline data supported the positive impact PBIS had on comprehensive campuses and their efforts to change disciplinary procedures. The three-tiered PBIS system supported positive behaviors for all students, disabled and non-disabled, but also offered additional supports for students with more intensive needs (Committee on School Health, 2004).

Effective Teaching Strategies

An integration of research and practice in areas such as assessment, curriculum, teacher competencies, and special education services was an important descriptor of effective alternative schools (Geurin & Denti, 1999). Research-based teaching strategies were categorized into three broad areas: instructional delivery, instructional supports, and monitoring and checking student progress (Rosenshine, 2007).

Instructional Delivery

In determining the method of instructional delivery, educators must first consider how groups interact and how individual students learn (Molenda & Russell, 2005). The two most important considerations were: (1) developing an independent lesson that allowed for group activities and promoted development of interpersonal skills, and (2) developing a teacher-led lesson that included a hands-on activity and promoted student engagement. Regarding effective teaching strategies, researchers supported the benefits of implementing a combination of research-based and research-validated strategies to provide a framework for an exemplar program (Kochhar, 1998).

Prior to teaching a new concept, it was recommended teachers conduct short reviews of previous lessons to help students build upon previous skills and make

connections with prior content (Weimer, 2013). According to Lang (2016), the first five minutes of a lesson provided opportunities to prepare students for learning and peek their interest in the subject matter. Review of previous lessons could be conducted in five to eight minutes. Teachers could review previously taught concepts, vocabulary, formulas, or events (Rosenshine, 2007). Likewise, teachers could provide additional practice on basic facts and skills.

Reviewing concepts and skills also assisted with the completion of homework (Corno & Xu, 2004). Students could work together to check each other's work on difficult or challenging concepts. These reviews ensured students understood concepts prior to moving on to new lessons. Effective teachers also reviewed concepts and standards taught daily; daily review was extremely important when teaching subsequent learning (Rosenshine, 2012).

Effective teachers understood the importance of not overwhelming students and alternatively teaching information in small increments, allowing students to master one concept prior to introducing another (Sweller, 1994). They checked for understanding by asking questions and retaught concepts as needed. Teachers previewed the lesson and identified ways to present the lesson in smaller steps (Tanner, 2013). This strategy was extremely helpful when teaching multi-step math concepts that required students to learn one skill before another, such as computing prior to learning to regroup (Anderson & Burns, 1987).

Teaching in small increments could be time consuming, requiring a great deal of planning and modifications based on student needs (Rosenshine, 2012). Instruction time varied, but effective teachers allotted at least 40 minutes for instruction of new materials,

opposed to less effective teachers who spent only 11 minutes on new concepts/skills before assigning independent practice (Rosenshine, 2012). Without sufficient practice, teachers needed to explain information repeatedly as the lesson transitioned to independent practice (Anderson, 2008).

New information was easily forgotten when teachers failed to provide guided practice or sufficient rehearsal. Insufficient practice time resulted in decreased abilities to store, recall, or use material (R. Clark, 2009). Yet, there was a distinct difference between deliberate practice and rote repetition, although the terms were often used interchangeably (Brabeck, Jeffrey, & Fry, 2016). Rote repetition simply meant repeating a task and lacked educational value when implemented outside of other strategies. Deliberate practice had educational benefits and entailed attention, rehearsal, and repetition (Brabeck et al., 2016). "Deliberate practice consists of activities purposely designed to improve performance" (Gobet & Campitelli, 2007, p. 160).

Research findings emphasized the importance of information processing, which in practice was defined as providing time for rephrasing, elaborating, and summarizing information (Rosenshine, 2012). Effective teachers facilitated the lesson, provided feedback, and offered opportunities for students to scaffold (Stenger, 2014). Guided practice could be used with the whole class, small groups, or with an individual, each of which provided teachers opportunities to give additional information to help students calibrate and synthesize information (Gibson, 2010).

Instructional Support

Classrooms were described as communities of learners with unique learning modalities, strengths, interests, and levels of performance and potential (Rogoff,

Turkanis, Bartlett, & Martinez-Pons, 2003). Effective teaching strategies supported student engagement, performance, and achievement (Pressley & Woloshyn, 1995). Good III, Simmons, & Kame'enui (2001) highlighted the importance of providing students with instructional support when introducing new material. Examples of instructional supports included a reasonable balance between differentiated instruction, and a selection of teaching resources and methods (Tobias & Duffy, 2009). When examining effective instructional supports, research emphasized the importance of three commonly used approaches: (1) ask questions and check responses, (2) provide models, and (3) provide scaffolds.

Ask questions and check responses. Effective teachers asked questions during instruction to check knowledge of new information, practiced application of new concepts, and made connections to previously taught skills and concepts (King, 1994). Additionally, questions were designed to determine if lessons needed to be retaught or students had mastered a specific skill (D. Fisher & Frey, 2007). During guided practice, effective teachers generally used two forms of questions: (1) structured questions with a specific response and (2) process questions that required students to explain the process used to solve the problem (Rosenshine, 2012). Effective teachers prompted students throughout the text to encourage the use of who, what, where, and how questions before, during, and after reading (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995).

Provide models. Modeling was proven to be effective in all core subject areas (Pressley & Woloshyn, 1995). Prompts and models could be used to teach skills and concepts as students developed independence and mastery. Modeling was also extremely important when solving mathematical problems (Evertson, Anderson, Anderson, &

Brophy, 1980). Researchers referred to this method of modeling as work examples, where teachers provided the solution and steps required to solve the problem (van Gog, Paas, & Sweller, 2010). Essentially, prompts, modeling, guided practice, and supervised independent practice could be used to successfully complete and learn many tasks and skills (Goeke, 2008).

Provide scaffolds. Difficult tasks were taught more successfully with the support of scaffolds or instructional supports (Rosenshine & Meister, 1992). "In education, scaffolding refers to a variety of instructional techniques used to move students progressively toward stronger understanding and, ultimately, greater independence in the learning process" (Education Reform, 2015, p. 1). Scaffolds were considered temporary and were gradually removed after acquisition of a desired skill or concept. The strategies used for scaffolding included verbal cues, such as thinking aloud, and concrete tools such as cue cards, checklists, or models of completed tasks (Rosenshine, 2012).

According to Alibali (2006), as students transitioned through the learning process to master a skill or task, various scaffolds could be used to support learning of more complex content. It was recommended that scaffolds be utilized when a student was not making adequate progress on a specific task or struggling to understand a concept (Spectrum Newsletter, 2017). Table 1 provides examples of scaffolds that could be used in the instructional environment to help students master content.

Table 1

Ways to Use Scaffolds During Instruction

Scaffold	Ways to Use Scaffolds During Instruction
Advance organizers	• *Tools used to introduce new content and tasks to help students learn about the topic:* Venn diagrams; flow; organizational charts; outlines; mnemonics; statements to situate the task or content; rubrics
Cue Cards	• *Prepared cards to assist students in discussing a topic or content area:* Vocabulary words; content-specific stem sentences; formulas; concepts to define.
Concept/Mind Maps	• *Maps that show relationships:* Partially completed maps for students to complete or students create their own maps based on their current knowledge of the task or concept.
Examples	• *Samples, specimens, illustrations, problems:* Real objects; illustrative problems used to represent something.
Explanations	• *More detailed information to move students along on a task or in their thinking of a concept:* Written instructions; verbal explanations
Handouts	• *Prepared handouts* that contain task- and content-related information, but with less detail and room for student note taking.
Hints	• *Suggestions and clues to move students along*.
Prompts	• *A physical or verbal cue to remind—to aid in recall of prior or assumed knowledge.* Physical: body movements such as pointing, nodding, blinking, foot tapping. Verbal: Words, statements, and questions.
Question Cards	• *Prepared cards with content- and task-specific questions* given to students to ask each other pertinent questions about a topic or content area.
Question Stems	• *Incomplete sentences, which students complete:* Encourages deep thinking by using higher order "What if" questions.
Stories	• *Stories relate complex and abstract material to situations more familiar with students.* Recite stories to inspire and motivate learners.
Visual Scaffolds	• Pointing; representational gestures, diagrams such as charts and graphs, and other methods of highlighting visual information.

Note. Excerpts taken from Alibali (2006).

Monitoring and Checking Student Progress

Lessons lacking important instructional components significantly decreased the students' probability of retention (Fielding & Pearson, 1994; Pressley, 2006). Whereas school administrators used accountability measures like benchmarks and state testing to monitor student progress, effective teachers routinely embedded monitoring tools into their instructional planning (Whitehurst, 2014). Formative and summative assessments

provided good insights into student progress (Cornelius, 2015). A review of the literature also suggested alternative ways to monitor student progress: (1) constructed responses and student inquiry, (2) independent practice, (3) weekly and monthly reviews.

Constructed responses and student inquiry. Schools increasingly transitioned toward the use of constructed responses and student inquiry to assess student knowledge (Wainer & Thissen, 2009). Constructed responses were characterized by open-ended essay questions that assessed students' cognitive knowledge and reasoning skills (Oosterhof, Conrad, & Ely, 2008). To adequately prepare students for the future, teachers must help students develop skills necessary to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate (Tankersley, 2007). State standards required teachers to focus on inquiry connected with real-life experiences and to teach fact-finding strategies (Knox, 2008). Student inquiry used questions, interests, and curiosities to guide instruction. The purpose of student inquiry was to assist with the development of critical thinking skills and make learning more relevant (Edwards, 1997).

Independent practice. Typically, independent practice immediately followed the large group lesson, but also could be assigned as homework (Lewis, 2016). Independent practice provided opportunities to practice previously taught skills or concepts (Turner, 2017). Independent practice was instrumental in students developing fluency and automaticity (Diller, 2016). The CCSS ELA standards set an expectation for students to read speak and fluently, and the mathematics standards se the expectation for students master basic math facts. Effective teachers understood the importance of extensive independent practice and provided multiple opportunities throughout the instructional day to increase fluency and automaticity skills (Rupley, Blair, & Nichols, 2009).

Teachers were tasked with ensuring student preparation for independent practice providing students with the foundational understanding necessary to complete the task (Farr, 2010). For this reason, effective teachers offered some form of lesson prior to independent practice (Cunningham, 1991). For example, a teacher could use an overhead projector to demonstrate how to outline or summarize a reading passage, or how to apply a formula to a math problem. This allowed the teacher to carefully review and model the process, and provide clear expectations (Duffy, 2003; Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). Most importantly, research showed that students were more engaged in learning when teachers circulated the classroom and monitored assigned independent practice, allowing opportunities for 1:1 assistance (Cornelius, 2015; Harvey & Goudvis, 2000).

Conduct weekly and monthly reviews. Effective teachers provided a summary of the previous lesson inclusive of the main ideas to refresh the students' memory (Blazer, 2014). Additionally, students benefited from consistent weekly and monthly reviews to assure they were progressing toward mastery. The challenge for teachers was ensuring students mastered previously taught skills prior to introducing next concepts (Rosenshine, 2012).

Administrators often pressured teachers to adhere to a pacing guide to ensure they addressed all the grade level standards. Unfortunately, feeling compelled to cover all the instructional material and neglecting to provide sufficient review time prior to moving to the next standard or concept resulted in more student errors and less efficiency in learning (Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008). However, researchers emphasized the importance of practice and review to retain information (Steele, 2005). Weekly quizzes, unit assessments, and

benchmark testing were designed to target and monitor student progress as well as provide alternative ways to review material and guide instruction (G. Morrison, 2010).

Research-Based Alternative Education Practices

Research-based practices in alternative education underlined the development of quality indicators of a program or curriculum (Odomet al., 2005). Tobin and Sprague (1999) suggested seven research-based alternative education strategies that should be considered when examining the design of programs: (1) low student-to-teacher ratios, (2) highly structured classes with behavioral classroom management, (3) positive rather than punitive emphasize on behavior, (4) adult mentors at school, (5) individualized behavioral interventions based on functional assessments, (6) social skill instruction, and (7) high-quality academic instruction.

Low Student-to-Teacher Ratios

Researchers agreed low student-to-teacher ratios were an important attribute of successful alternative schools (Aron, 2006; Farler, 2005; James-Gross, 2006). Small class sizes ensured teachers and staff had more individualized time to work with each student and created more opportunities for bonding (De La Ossa, 2005; Tobin & Spague, 1999). School bonding fostered healthy development and prevented problem behaviors (Catalano, Oesterle, Fleming, & Hawkins, 2004).

The ideal student-to-teacher ratio was a topic of debate. Typically, a reduced class size and low student-to-teacher ratio was defined as 20:1 (Finn & Achilles, 1990). However, the National Alternative Education Association (NAEA, 2014) recommended a “12:1 ratio to promote instruction” (p. 7). Other researchers asserted 10:1 was the optimal student-to-teacher ratio (McCreight, 1999; Reimer & Cash, 2003).

Researchers found positive effects of class size reduction on student achievement levels (Biddle & Berliner, 2002; Grissmer, 1999). Small class sizes afforded opportunities for teachers to build positive personal relationships, target individual learning needs, identify and address strengths and deficit areas, and develop a better understanding of life situations (De La Ossa, 2005; Ruzzi & Kraemer, 2006). Therefore, alternative education settings generally offered smaller classroom settings to emphasize new methodologies and hands-on learning, as well as individual and small group experiences (Cable et al., 2009).

Highly Structured Classes with Behavioral Classroom Management

A second effective practice in alternative education programs was providing a highly structured setting with embedded behavioral supports and expectations clearly outlined. T. Morrison (1979) suggested highly structured environments provided greater engagement and improved social climate. Reinforcement for the desired behavior was provided, making inappropriate behaviors irrelevant and less likely to occur (Biniker & Pindiprouli, 2008). Prompting and corrective feedback was temporarily required until negative behaviors were extinguished. According to Cooper, Heron, and Heward (2007), the extinction procedure occurred when a behavior no longer required reinforcement; subsequently, the duration and frequency of negative behaviors decreased.

Common behavior supports used in highly structured environments were simple class rules, token economies, and level systems. For more severe and serious behaviors, a student may require an FBA to assist with the development of a behavior intervention plan (Gonzalez & Brown, 2015). Behavior intervention plans typically included antecedents, strategies, and goals that provided the teacher with a blueprint to address

individual behaviors. Consistent implementation of a highly structured environment and positive behavior interventions helped students meet expectations and reshape inappropriate behaviors (Cable et al., 2009).

Positive Rather than Punitive Emphasize on Behavior

Positive approaches to address challenging behaviors were more effective than punitive approaches (Lassen et al., 2006; Mayer, 1995). Mayer (1995) found value in using positive reinforcement, praise, group rewards, and positive incentives for compliance. Nevertheless, research showed negative consequences continued to be the standard approach to challenging behaviors across the country (Bear, 1998). In comparison to what was acceptable in traditional school settings, alternative education placements had more latitude to implement positive approaches to behavior and fade the support in preparation of returning the student to the least restrictive environment (Tobin & Spague, 1999). Support and strategies could be faded after the student learned socially appropriate responses and attitudes, often referred to as self-regulatory skills.

Adult Mentors at School

According to Vance, Fernandez, and Biber (1998), providing students with school-based adult mentors had a profound impact on youth who exhibited aggressive behavior or emotional disturbance. "Promoting a school setting that emphasizes finding each high-risk child an adult mentor who can reach out and take a special interest in that child, may go a long way toward enhancing educational progress" (Vance et al., 1998, p. 220). However, not all students who attended alternative schools engaged in aggressive behaviors nor presented challenging behaviors that would benefit from the support of a

mentor (Slicker & Palmer, 1993). Vance et al. (1998) suggested more research was needed to determine the impact of mentoring on various populations and settings.

Mentor support included (a) listening, (b) helping problem-solve by providing coping strategies and ideas, and (c) observing, encouraging, and reinforcing positive behavior (Flower, McDaniel, & Jolivette, 2011). Mentoring was used as a safety net to provide support to students during challenging times (McGee & Lin, 2016). Mentoring activities made a notable difference in attendance, discipline, dropout rates, and student performance (Lampley & Johnson, 2010).

Individualized Behavioral Interventions Based on Functional Assessment

IDEA (2004) mandated individualized interventions based on the findings of an FBA when discipline problems triggered an alternative educational placement. An FBA was used to develop and design behavioral supports outlined in a behavior intervention plan (BIP) or behavioral goal (Biniker & Pindiprouli, 2008; Neilson & McEvoy, 2004). Since the 1990s, FBAs were used to meet the requirements of IDEA 1997 and amendments from IDEA 2004.

The foundation of FBAs was derived from applied behavior analysis, which began in the 1960s (Gresham, Watson, & Skinner, 2001). FBAs were conducted to find the antecedent and consequence of challenging behaviors. The results of the assessment were used to develop, implement, and monitor PBIS (O'Neill, Horner, Albin, Storey, & Sprague, 1996). According to research, effective application of FBA interventions yielded positive results for at-risk students (Biniker & Pindiprouli, 2008; Goh & Bombara, 2012).

Social Skill Instruction

Social skill instruction helped to remediate problem behaviors by teaching prosocial behaviors and helping students develop social competence (Gresham, Cook, Crews, & Kern, 2004). To be reintegrated into traditional school settings, students in alternative settings often needed to acquire social skills such as: (a) executive functioning (following directions, asking questions, and accepting "no" as a response), (b) developing and maintain friendships, (c) problem-solving and conflict resolution, (d) expressing alternatives to aggression, and (e) coping strategies to deal with anger (Flower et al., 2011).

H. Walker et al. (1998) found social skill deficits in school predicted future delinquency and poor vocational outcomes. Essentially, social skill instruction was imperative to remediating performance deficits. Students who learned prosocial behaviors could react more positively to public situations, thus leading to meaningful, productive relationships with peers, teachers, parents, and others (M. Miller, Lane, & Wehby, 2005)

High-Quality Academic Instruction

Students placed in alternative education settings generally required remediation in core subject areas due to failure in the traditional school setting (McGee & Lin, 2016). For this reason, many alternative schools and programs utilized high-quality academic instruction as a best practice (Cash, 2004; Romshek, 2007; Wagner, Wonacott & Jackson, 2005). Effective academic instruction helped them close gaps, make continued progress toward grade level standards, and keep up with non-disabled peers in traditional school settings (Flower et al., 2011). To address their learning needs, Maxwell (2006) suggested

a multidimensional approach be used, inclusive of individualized academic plans, structured curricula, and progress tracking. High-quality instruction included three fundamental components; curriculum, relevance, and differentiation.

Curriculum. Rigorous core curricula with tiered levels of student support were required for a program to be successful. NAEA (2014) emphasized the importance of curriculum including project-based learning, opportunities to participate in non-core content areas, and integration of life skills, problem-solving, teamwork, career readiness, time management, and small group learning opportunities. In agreement with Aron (2006), standard-based curricula with a career development emphasis helped cultivate skills vital to transitioning at-risk youth into adulthood.

Relevance. Teachers were responsible for making curriculum meaningful. This entailed teachers developing lessons that built upon background knowledge, real world experiences, and applicability to students' lives (D'Angelo & Zemanick, 2009). Relevant instruction was student-centered and often included hands-on activities (Neuenfeld, 2003). Teachers developed creative and innovative lessons that sparked an interest in learning (Reimer & Cash, 2003). To increase relevance, students should also be afforded opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities to enhance positive experiences during unstructured times (D'Angelo & Zemanick, 2009).

Differentiation. People learn differently, and thus individualized instruction tailored toward students' independent instructional level and learning modality were more beneficial (NAEA, 2014). Tomlinson (2004) asserted that students strived with meaningful, differentiated instruction that met their needs. Differentiation incorporated

strategies that promoted student learning and embed individual and group goals that extended to cooperative learning and academic teams (Downey, 2008).

Summary

The literature on effective teaching strategies used by alternative education schools varied, but with some consistency in practices. The literature review examined effective behavioral strategies used in the traditional school settings and alternative options when proactive measures were exhausted. Many traditional school settings still use zero tolerance policies that result in students being suspended or expelled from school, rather than positive behavioral interventions. Researchers agreed more proactive approaches to behavior were needed in schools, that students benefited from a continuum of placements tailored toward various populations (Cable et al., 2009).

Alternative education settings serve a vital role in education by servicing students who failed in traditional school settings or dropped out of school. When placing students in alternative settings, the goal should always be to return the student to the LRE. However, many times alternative schools were used as dumping grounds with no intention of returning the students to comprehensive campuses. Therefore, administrators must be able to identify effective teaching and behavioral strategies to place students in appropriate alternative settings.

Most alternative settings differed in their design and population, so it was inherently impossible to use a universal method to assess their effectiveness. Few studies were conducted on the effectiveness of alternative education programs, and findings should be viewed with caution due to the inability to generalize across all settings (Kochhar, 1998). Alternative education programs may be the only option for students

unsuccessful in traditional settings (Leone & Drakeford, 1999). Students who attended these programs demonstrated improved peer relationships, interest in education, and performance (Lehr, 2004). The research outlined effective characteristics, strategies, and practices of alternative education programs to guide administrators through the process of selecting an alternative program that can provide educational benefits.

Chapter II presented a review of the literature relevant to alternative education programs, including their history and common characteristics. Chapter III presented the methodology used in this study.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The intent of this qualitative case study was to described effective teaching and behavioral strategies exemplary non-public alternative education schools used to support student learning. The study also explored the influence of education specialists and administrators in academic achievement levels of students in grades 4 to 8. This chapter includes a detailed description of the research design, population sample, instrument, data collection process, and data analysis procedures.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore and describe the teaching and behavioral strategies exemplary, non-public alternative education schools used to support student learning as perceived by education specialists and site administrators at high-achieving, non-public alternative education schools in Los Angeles County, San Bernardino County, and Orange County.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What teaching strategies support student learning as perceived by education specialists and site administrators at exemplary non-public alternative education schools in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Orange Counties?
2. What behavioral strategies support student learning as perceived by education specialists and site administrators at exemplary non-public alternative education schools in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Orange Counties?

Research Design

A qualitative case study was conducted to take an in-depth inquiry into non-public alternative schools to explore current academic instructional practices and effective teaching strategies that contribute to high student academic achievement levels. Strauss and Corbin (1990) proposed one reason to conduct qualitative research was to uncover and understand the meaning behind a phenomenon for which little was known. Case study is a type of qualitative research design that provides insight through contextual analysis of a specific issue (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The case study design was used for this study to gather data to analyze multiple teacher and site administrator perspectives regarding the use of teaching and behavioral strategies.

Data collected from interviews provided the researcher an opportunity to appraise instructional practices and strategies used in non-public alternative educational settings. Patton (2012) described qualitative research as a methodology that requires the "researcher to gather data that must be analyzed through the use of informed judgment to identify major and minor themes expressed by participants" (p. 9). Interviews were conducted with the education specialist and site administrators at the non-public schools selected for this study to obtain information regarding the teaching and behavioral strategies used at their schools. Interview questions were designed to collect information regarding the use of teaching and behavioral strategies used at the participating non-public alternative education schools.

The qualitative case study research design also assisted with the identification of themes, patterns, and other major factors that contributed to overall effective learning in non-public alternative school settings. According to Patton (2015), one advantage of

using qualitative analysis was to have interview data the researcher could use to interpret and develop meaningful patterns and themes. Data collected were used to identify variables of effective teaching and behavioral strategies used by effective non-public schools.

Population

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006), a population is described as "a group of elements or cases, whether individuals, objects, or events, that confirm to specific criteria and to which we intend to generalize the results of the research" (p. 129). Alternative education schools include various types of educational settings that deviate from a traditional school setting. Alternative education schools are separate from the mainstream K-12 educational system and designed to meet the needs of students with academic or behavioral difficulties. The researcher identified non-public alternative school in California designed to address severe student behaviors for the population of this study. Non-public schools were classified as private schools according to the CDE. There are currently 3,073 private schools in California serving 10,881 students (CDE, 2017).

The target population was comprised of education specialists and site administrators in private alternative education schools located in southern California. The researcher specifically focused on non-public alternative education schools located in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Orange Counties. These three counties had a total of 1,309 non-public alternative education schools. The researcher used nonprobability and purposive sampling to select one site from each county to provide some degree of generalization.

Sample

The researcher used nonprobability sampling for this case study. "Nonprobability sampling does not include any type of random selection from the population" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 125). McMillan and Schumacher (2006) suggested using participants accessible to the research who possessed certain characteristics. Purposeful sampling was defined as a method whereby the researcher "purposively selects individuals who they believe will be good sources of information" (Patton, 2012, p. 51). Therefore, the researcher used purposeful sampling for selecting the geographic area for this study.

Developing a selection criterion was considered the beginning stage of purposeful sampling, and thus essential to determining the people or sites to be studied (Merriam, 2001). The researcher selected three non-public alternative education schools located in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Orange Counties. These three schools were designated as exemplary schools by local county superintendents that met the following criteria:

- Non-public school is servicing students in grades 4-8
- Non-public school located in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, or Orange County
- Established for at least 3 years
- Certified with CDE as a non-public school
- Demonstrated an ability to rehabilitate and return students to district

The researcher selected education specialists from each of the three sites who met the following criteria:

1. At least two years teaching experience in the non-public school setting.
2. Assigned to grades levels 4-8.
3. Recommended by the site administrator as a teacher known for using a variety of teaching and behavioral strategies to support student academic achievement.
4. A willingness to participate in the study.

The administrator from each of the non-public schools was selected for this study and met the following criteria:

1. At least three years of administrative experience at the school.
2. Assigned to a non-public school designed to service students identified with learning and/or behavioral issues.
3. A willingness to participate in the study.

Sample Size

In accordance with Daniel (2012), the researcher should take the “burden on study participants into consideration [and] choose the smallest sample necessary to satisfy the objectives of [the] study” (p. 6). Creswell (2007) suggested the researcher choose fewer than four or five cases. The sample size for this study included non-public alternative education schools in three southern California counties, increasing the geographic diversity and probability of generalizing the findings to a larger population. The researcher selected three non-public schools for the case study and the sample included four education specialists and one site administrator from each of the three southern

California non-public schools identified for the study. These 12 total participants consisted of 9 education specialists and 3 administrators. Collins, Onwuegbuzie, and Jiao (2007) suggested a researcher can "make generalizations to other participants, population, settings, locations, contexts, events, incidents, activities, experiences, times, and or processes" when he or she successfully met the following criteria: "a) generate adequate data pertaining to the phenomenon of interest under study…, [and] b) help the researcher to make...analytical generalizations" (p. 270). Creswell (2007) stated "there is not a set number of cases" (p. 76) required to conduct an overall analysis of the study of interest. Therefore, this research conducted case studies of three non-public schools with the intent to contribute to research on alternative education programs.

Instrument

The researcher conducted a case study of three non-public schools located in three different counties. According to Patton (2015), a case study stands on its own merit and provides a detailed story about the person, organization, event, campaign, or program under inquiry. For this study, exemplary non-public schools in Orange County, Los Angeles County, and San Bernardino County were the unit of analysis.

The researcher used the literature review matrix (Appendix A) to develop semi-structured questions designed to collect data for answering the study's research questions. The researcher used a question alignment table (Appendix B) and expert panel review to ensure the interview questions were aligned to the study's research questions. Then, the researcher developed an interview protocol to include a narrative script and interview questions (Appendix C).

Validity

Researchers varies in their viewpoints regarding validity, reliability, and trustworthiness on qualitative studies. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued trustworthiness of research notably depended on the issues described as validity and reliability in quantitative data. However, Stenbacka (2001) argued the term validity was not pertinent to qualitative research. Regardless, researchers agreed a qualifying check was vital to qualitative research and validity should be redefined for qualitative research (Stenbacka, 2001).

Content validity was defined as the degree to which the instrument measured the content it was designed to measure (Patton, 2015). Content validity was considered an important aspect of qualitative research (Golafshani, 2003). The researcher improved content validity by conducting a review of the interview protocol (Appendix C) and question alignment table (Appendix B) using two experts working in K-8 educational settings. The two experts had doctorate degrees and expertise with development of interview questions and qualitative research. Based on their feedback, the researcher adjusted the interview protocols and questions.

Thomson (2011) described descriptive validity as a measure of how accurately the data collected reflected what the participants said and meant. During the interviews, the researcher used semi-structured questions to allow participants to speak openly and make additional comments as they deemed appropriate to ensure their perception was clearly conveyed. Interviews were recorded to allow the researcher an opportunity to transcribe the data and check the accuracy in connect to the field notes. The transcribed data and notes were provided to the participants for review and to confirm their accuracy.

According to Thomson (2011), interpretive validity is a measure of how well the research captures the meaning or perceptions of the participants. For this study, recording the interviews afforded the researcher an opportunity to actively listen to participant responses, abstract pertinent information regarding their perceptions, and reflect on relationships with the research questions. Probing and follow-up questions were used to evaluate the perception of participants and increase interpretive validity.

Reliability

The quality of the instrument was determined by the reliability and validity of its measurements (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008). An instrument was said to be reliable if it produced consistent results when used with multiple participants over time (Patten, 2015). There are different ways to estimate the reliability of a measure. An interview protocol (Appendix C) was developed by the researcher and it was reviewed by an expert panel to improve the reliability of the interview questions.

Field Test

Field testing was also used to improve the reliability of the instrument. Jacob and Furgerson (2012) suggested the level of reliability was increased by conducting a field test. For this study, a field test was conducted using an education specialist and a site administrator currently working in a non-public alternative education school setting who met the requirements of the sample, but were not include in the study. An expert was selected to observe the field test interviews and provided feedback to the researcher. The expert had an earned doctorate; experience with qualitative, interview research; and experience with alternative schools.

According to Patten (2012), "a test is said to be reliable if it yields consistent results" (p. 73). The interview questions were semi-structured, but provided an opportunity to probe and ask follow-up questions. After the field test, the expert observer provided feedback regarding the connection between the research questions and proposed interview questions. The feedback was used to refine the interview questions. The field test provided the researcher with valuable information on interview techniques, question clarity, and an idea of the type of data to analyzed.

Data Collection

An application to conduct research was submitted to Brandman University's Institutional Review Board (BUIRB) for approval along with the informed consent (Appendix D) and Participant Bill of Rights (Appendix E). BUIRB reviews all research involving humans to ensure the proposed study meets established requirements of maintaining professional standards and protecting the rights and confidentiality of human participants. The BUIRB process included a review of the research purpose and questions, methodology, and the research questions to ensure the study complied with laws regarding the privacy of participants, and any potential risk of the study was identified and addressed by the researcher. Data collection commenced after the BUIRB reviewed and approved the application to conduct research.

Gaining trust was considered critical to develop a comfortable environment in which questions were answered in an open and honest manner (Poole & Mauthner, 2014). For this reason, a letter was sent to site administrators requesting permission to conduct these studies (see Appendix F). The letter included a description of the study, potential risks, and estimated time commitments for staff involved. Upon receiving

approval from the site administrator, the researcher requested the administrator recommend four educational specialists to participate in the study. An introduction letter was sent to the recommended education specialists (see Appendix G). The introduction letter included instructions and provided the informed consent and Participant Bill of Rights.

Upon receiving approval from the site administrator, the researcher requested the administrator recommend four educational specialists to participate in the study and provide their email contact for sending them invitation to participate. An invitation email was sent to the recommended education specialist (see Appendix G). The invitation email included an overview of the study and requested them to reply with agreement to participate. Then the educational specialists were sent a follow up email to set date and time for interview. A confirmation email as then sent and included a copy of the interview questions, informed consent, and Brandman Bill of Rights.

Potential interviewees were informed the interview would include 6 main questions and 5 probing sub-questions. Participants were told they had the right to decline to respond to any question, without penalty, and the right to withdraw from the study at any time. To obtain 100% participation, the researcher provided participants with a small token of appreciation for their time; participants were provided $5 Starbucks and Jamba Juice gift cards for participation in the study.

Interviews

Interviews were considered central to qualitative data collection and a highly reflective way to explore perceptions (Poole & Mauthner, 2014). Marshall and Rossman (2006) indicated the fundamental benefit of individual interviews was to take an in-depth

look at a person's perspective relevant to an event or experience. As such, interviews were used as the primary form of data collection for this case study. The purpose of the interviews was to elicit information from the participants by asking semi-structured questions.

Interviews were conducted with teachers and site administrators of the three participating non-public alternative education schools. After agreeing to participate in the study, interviewees were contacted to determine their availability. The researcher developed a schedule for each site based on the availability of the interviewees, with adequate time between interviews to calibrate information and record field notes. A copy of the interview questions was emailed to all participants prior to the actual interview, along with the informed consent form. Interviews were conducted at a mutually agreed upon time and location. Prior to each interview, the research obtained a copy of the informed consent form, and reiterated the participants rights as a study participant. The research recorded each interview with permission of the interviewee. The interviews were transcribed and a copy of the transcript was sent to the interviewee to confirm its accuracy. Afterward, the transcripts were prepared for data analysis.

Data Analysis

Qualitative research required careful examination of the data to identify patterns and themes (Patton, 2015), which transcended into meaning of the data (Yazan, 2015). In agreement with this approach, McMillan and Schumacher (2010) conceded the importance of carefully analyzing data. The researcher analyzed the qualitative data by first preparing and organizing the data for analysis. Organization of the data included transcribing the audio recordings of the interviews. Interviewees were provided

transcripts of the interviews for review to ensure accuracy. After the interviewees confirmed the validity of the interview transcripts, they were uploaded into NVivo, a software program that allows researchers to examine data for patterns to determine themes. An analysis of the data was conducted to delineate the most common themes based on frequency of occurrences across the interviewees.

Currently, there are no set guidelines for coding data; however, some general procedures exist (Creswell, 2007; Tesch, 1990). Per Creswell (2014), the coding process entailed acquiring an understanding of the written/text data, sorting data into text or image segments, labeling the segments with codes, examining codes for reoccurring data and overlap, and combining codes into broad themes. The coding process helped organize the data into different themes.

Inter-rater Reliability

Inter-rater reliability referred to "the extent to which two or more persons agree about what they have seen, heard, or rated" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 182). To ensure inter-rater reliability, the researcher had an expert with coding experience and a doctoral degree analyze and code 10% of the data. Sample transcripts and a list of themes were given to the expert, with guidelines to determine the frequency in which each theme emerged within the transcript.

The expert reviewed the themes to identify similarities or oppositions with themes discovered by the researcher. Inter-rater reliability allows "multiple analysts… [to] discuss what they see in the data, share insights, and consider what emerges from their different perspectives" (Patton, 2015, p. 667). Validity of the data was increased by minimizing advertent researcher bias through the inter-rater reliability process.

According to Patton (2015), reliability was increased when a peer researcher analyzed at least 10% of the coding and the description of the study's themes. A sample transcript and a list of themes were given to the expert with guidelines to determine the match of the coding by the researcher with the expert. The expert determined there was an 80% or greater match to establish reliability.

Limitations

Limitations of a study include exposure to conditions that potentially weaken the study (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2000; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Potential limitations were identified and addressed to protect the validity and interpretation of data collected. Limitations for this case study included the small sample size and the research design. In agreement with Robert Stake (1995), "The benefits of multi-case study will be limited if fewer than, say, 4 cases are chosen, or more than 10" (p. 107). This case study was limited to three cases and; therefore, neglected to show enough interactivity between programs.

Researchers hold various viewpoints regarding the limitations of interviews. The primary limitations associated with interviews, and thus limitations of this study, included:

- Not all interviewees articulated their perception or experience in a uniform manner
- Interviews were subject to the skill of the researcher
- The interview protocol did not represent a neutral tool of data gathering as it results in merely an interaction between the interviewer and interviewee (Fontana & Frey, 2003; Rubin & Rubin, 2005)

Summary

Chapter III summarized data collected from the qualitative case study. The research design used qualitative case study approach. The researcher attempted to make sense of and interpret the phenomena based on the descriptions of people involved. The research sought to define effective teaching and behavioral strategies commonly used in non-public school settings. Data were used to develop themes and identify patterns. The researcher described the phenomenon, analyzed the data, and interpreted the data collected. Chapter IV provides more in-depth information on the data collected and describes the themes and patterns derived from the data.

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Chapter IV includes the findings from data collected during a qualitative case study of non-public alternative education schools in Los Angeles County, San Bernardino County, and Orange County. Data collected from interviews with site administrators and education specialists are presented and summarized to outline common themes of effective teaching and behavioral strategies used in exemplary non-public school settings. Exemplary non-public schools were defined by the researcher as alternative education schools providing programs to improve student academic, behavioral, and social development.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore and describe the teaching and behavioral strategies exemplary, non-public alternative education schools used to support student learning as perceived by education specialists and site administrators at high-achieving, non-public alternative education schools in Los Angeles County, San Bernardino County, and Orange County.

Research Questions

1. What teaching strategies support student learning as perceived by education specialists and site administrators at exemplary non-public alternative education schools in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Orange Counties?
2. What behavioral strategies support student learning as perceived by education specialists and site administrators at exemplary non-public alternative education schools in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Orange Counties?

Methodology

A qualitative case study was used to describe effective teaching and behavioral strategies exemplary non-public alternative education schools used to support student learning. The study explored the influence of education specialists and administrators in academic achievement levels of students in grades 4 to 8. Interviews were conducted with education specialist and the site administrators of three non-public alternative education schools. Appendix B provides tables indicating how the interview questions aligned with the research questions.

Population and Sample

The population for this case study was 3,073 non-public schools in California. Non-public schools were classified as private schools according to the CDE (website 2017). The study narrowed the broad continuum of private schools to those located in southern California and specifically in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Orange Counties. At the time of this study, 1,309 private schools were in the three counties collectively.

The researcher identified the study sample by asking the county superintendent to provide recommendations of exemplary non-public schools with the following criteria:

- Served students in grades 4-8
- Located in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, or Orange County
- Established for at least three years
- Certified with CDE as a non-public school
- Demonstrated an ability to rehabilitate and return students to district

The researcher selected education specialists from each of the three sites who met the following criteria:

- At least two years teaching experience in the non-public school setting.
- Assigned to grades levels 4-8.
- Recommended by the site administrator as a teacher known for using a variety of teaching and behavioral strategies to support student academic achievement.
- A willingness to participate in the study.

The administrator from each of the non-public schools was selected for this study and met the following criteria:

- At least three years of administrative experience at the school.
- Assigned to a non-public school designed to service students identified with learning and/or behavioral issues.
- A willingness to participate in the study.

Sample

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), the group of people identified by the researcher to collect data defined the sample. The researcher utilized nonprobability and purposeful convenience sampling for this case study. The sample frame included non-public school site administrators and education specialists in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Orange Counties, and conveniently located within travel distance from the researcher. One non-public school was selected from each county increasing the geographic diversity and probability of generalizing the findings to a larger population.

The researcher interviewed a total of three site administrators and nine education specialists. Table 2 provides a breakdown of the participants from each county.

Table 2

Breakdown of Participants in This Study

Participant	County	Age Range	Gender	Years as Teacher	Years in Administration
Participant A	Los Angeles	50-59	M		10
Participant B	Los Angeles	20-29	F	3	
Participant C	Los Angeles	20-29	F	2	
Participant D	Los Angeles	30-39	F	2	
Participant E	Los Angeles	30-39	F	4	
Participant F	San Bernardino	20-29	F	2	
Participant G	San Bernardino	30-39	F	5	
Participant H	San Bernardino	40-49	M		8
Participant I	San Bernardino	20-29	F	3	
Participant J	Orange	30-39	F		5
Participant K	Orange	30-39	F	5	
Participant L	Orange	20-29	F	3	

Presentation and Analysis of Data

Data Analysis by Participant

Participant A. The site administrator discussed the importance of providing individualized instruction and incentives for students. He shared it was about reward systems. He explained students came from diverse backgrounds and required an individualized approach. This was accomplished by tailoring instruction toward student interests. Currently, they serve over 20 school districts, so it made it difficult to implement a universal program.

During the interview, he discussed opportunities for collaboration throughout the week. The teachers were afforded at least one day of time during the week to plan academic lessons and discuss any behavioral concerns with the BCBA. He shared the

BCBA was trained in Applied Behavior Analysis, which helped teachers implement effective behavioral strategies in the classroom setting.

Lastly, the site administrator discussed the importance of offering positive reinforcement with incentives students wanted. He shared that within reason, the school was willing to provide items from the student store, time with staff members of their choice, and computer time. The administrator also offers preferred activities like hiking, swimming, basketball, and community-based instruction to assist with encouraging students to use the replacement behavior and to remain on task. Table 3 presents themes generated from the interview.

Table 3

Themes Identified from Interview with Participant A

Research Questions	Themes Identified
1: What teaching strategies support student learning as perceived by education specialists and site administrators at exemplary non-public alternative education schools in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Orange Counties?	• Individualized instruction • Build instruction based on student interest
2: What behavioral strategies support student learning as perceived by education specialists and site administrators at exemplary non-public alternative education schools in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Orange Counties?	• Individual incentives • Consult with the BCBA • Use Applied Behavior Analysis • Positive Reinforcement • Offer choices with preferred activities

Participant B. The education specialists discussed various strategies that can be used to support student learning. She specifically modified assignments based on student needs. This entailed reducing the amount of problems on the worksheet or providing the student with choices. These strategies resulted in a “positive outcome.”

Participant B also used Google classroom to support students with learning challenges. A scatter plot was used to determine where changes need to be made in lessons for core subject areas. The scatter plot was generated from a report provided in Google classroom and helped the teacher monitor student progress.

Regarding effective behavioral strategies, the education specialist indicated she offered individual and group incentives in the classroom. Students could earn classroom pizza parties, points to go to the student store on Friday, or individual sticker incentives. The education specialist also recently implemented meditation as a behavioral strategy. Table 4 presents themes generated from the interview.

Table 4

Themes Identified from Interview with Participant B

Research Questions	Themes Identified
1: What teaching strategies support student learning as perceived by education specialists and site administrators at exemplary non-public alternative education schools in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Orange Counties?	• Individualized instruction • Google classroom • Modify assignments • Reduce amount of questions on worksheet • Provide choices • Scatter plot
2: What behavioral strategies support student learning as perceived by education specialists and site administrators at exemplary non-public alternative education schools in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Orange Counties?	• Individual incentives • Group incentives • Point system • Meditation

Participant C. The education specialist emphasized the importance of individualized instruction and shared one strategy used was reducing the amount of questions. This entailed replacing one worksheet with another one that was more appropriate. Providing choices to students and modifying the assigned workload had a positive effect in supporting student learning. In addition, Google classroom was used to

design lessons for each student at their instructional level and create a balance in preferred and non-preferred activities to support students with learning and behavioral challenges.

Participant C shared the ability to collaborate with other teachers highly depended upon the population of students at the time. The education specialist explained sometimes there was only one class with elementary school grade level students enrolled. Due to the disparity in grade levels in each class, education specialist rarely plan with other teachers assigned to the same grade level.

Participant C stressed the importance of students earning privileges and individual and group incentives. These strategies were used to reshape student behaviors. Students were required to earn the privilege to use the computer, eat in the cafeteria independently, and attend monthly field trips. A point sheet was used with each student so he or she could earn points to purchase items in the student store. They also earned points as a team for classroom pizza parties. Playing piano music in the classroom simultaneously while students engage in independent work is another strategy used to help students remain on task. Table 5 presents themes generated from the interview.

Table 5

Themes Identified from Interview with Participant C

Research Questions	Themes Identified
1: What teaching strategies support student learning as perceived by education specialists and site administrators at exemplary non-public alternative education schools in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Orange Counties?	• Individualized instruction • Reduce the amount of questions • Providing choices • Using various worksheets to teach the same concept • Google classroom
2: What behavioral strategies support student learning as perceived by education specialists and site administrators at exemplary non-public	• Individual incentives • Group incentives • Earned autonomy

alternative education schools in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Orange Counties?	• Point system • Calming piano music

Participant D. The education specialist discussed the importance of an individualized schedule and learning system. Participant D explained her classroom was composed of students in varying grades and ages. For this reason, developing one lesson for the entire class was a challenge. Teaching strategies included providing intensive instruction utilizing 1:1 aides or the use of small group instruction.

Participant D shared most collaboration occurred between the BCBA and classroom teachers. BCBAs played an integral role in developing individualized schedules for students. They were also instrumental in helping education specialists develop behavior intervention plans and behavior goals for individual students.

Participant D used a whole class reward system and an individual reward system. A point system and visual schedules were used to support student learning. Points earned could be used to purchase items at the student store. The visual schedules helped with keeping students on task and transitioning from preferred to non-preferred activities. Table 6 presents themes generated from the interview.

Table 6

Themes Identified from Interview with Participant D

Research Questions	Themes Identified
1: What teaching strategies support student learning as perceived by education specialists and site administrators at exemplary non-public alternative education schools in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Orange Counties?	• Individualized instruction • Intensive instruction • Small group instruction
2: What behavioral strategies support student learning as perceived by education specialists and site administrators at exemplary non-public alternative education schools in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Orange Counties?	• Individual incentives • Whole class reward system • Visual schedules • Consultation with the BCBA • Behavior intervention plans • Behavior goals

	• Point systems

Participant E. The education specialist emphasized the importance of frequent checks for understanding and assessments to support student learning. Participant E further explained how she created her own curriculum to meet the needs of the students. The instruction was individualized to ensure students received work at their instructional level.

Participant E shared the importance of using video modeling and social stories to teach appropriate behaviors. She also used behavior points and a behavior chart in the classroom setting. The behavioral chart includes clips that are moved up and down based on the usage of appropriate classroom behaviors by each individual student. Contingency maps were also used to monitor behavior. On-going collaboration with the BCBA helped the education specialist implement effective behavioral strategies in the classroom and the development of effective behavior intervention plans. Table 7 presents themes generated from the interview.

Table 7

Themes Identified from Interview with Participant E

Research Questions	Themes Identified
1: What teaching strategies support student learning as perceived by education specialists and site administrators at exemplary non-public alternative education schools in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Orange Counties?	• Check for understanding • Individualized instruction
2: What behavioral strategies support student learning as perceived by education specialists and site administrators at exemplary non-public alternative education schools in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Orange Counties?	• Individual incentives • Video modeling • Social stories • Point system • Behavioral chart • Contingency maps

- Consult with the BCBA
- Behavior intervention plans

Participant F. The education specialist shared the importance of scaffolding as a strategy to support student learning. Scaffolding strategies included providing visuals and examples of the assigned task. Visuals included multiplication tables on the student desk, visual scaffolds in the classroom such as posters explaining the writing process, and how to organize thoughts with the use of a graphic organizer.

Participant F explained most students understood the value of money and liked earning fake money as an incentive. Students also learned how to save the money to purchase something from the student store. Participant F explained the importance of individualized incentive programs to help students stay on task, complete assignments, and use appropriate behaviors. In addition, she stressed the importance of not negotiating with students, but rather providing clear expectations.

Participant F also discussed the use of group projects in the classroom setting. These projects were used to teach students to work collaboratively as a team, but also allowed for peer modeling. In addition, upon successful completion of these group projects, students had the opportunity to earn class parties or field trips of their choice. Table 8 presents themes generated from the interview.

Table 8

Themes Identified from Interview with Participant F

Research Questions	Themes Identified
1: What teaching strategies support student learning as perceived by education specialists and site administrators at exemplary non-public alternative education schools in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Orange Counties?	• Scaffolding • Provide examples • Provide visual aids • Use of graphic organizers • Group projects • Peer modeling
2: What behavioral strategies support student learning as perceived by education specialists and site administrators at exemplary non-public alternative education schools in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Orange Counties?	• Individual incentives • Earn fake money to use in the student store • Provide clear expectations without negotiating with students

Participant G. The education specialist shared she was an English major, so she emphasized the importance of reading comprehension and writing skills. At times, she struggled with keeping the attention of students during instruction. As a result, Participant G developed lessons relevant and interesting to students. Additionally, work was individualized as needed to compensate for the various instructional levels. She described her strategies as “thinking outside of the box.” These were effective teaching strategies used to sustain student attention and support learning.

Participant G explained she taught college readiness skills. In preparation for higher education, students were explicitly taught writing skills and required to write 20-page essays. Students learned how to use the writing process and build on previously taught skills. An example was from writing more abstract essays to writing samples that were more detailed and complex.

Regarding behavioral strategies, Participant G shared how she used her own personal experiences to reshape behaviors. Her approach involved developing

relationships with students and consistently expressing the importance of working towards life goals. This included earning good grades or engaging in appropriate behaviors to be college bound. Table 9 presents themes generated from the interview.

Table 9

Themes Identified from Interview with Participant G

Research Questions	Themes Identified
1: What teaching strategies support student learning as perceived by education specialists and site administrators at exemplary non-public alternative education schools in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Orange Counties?	• Develop lessons on student interest • Individualized instruction • Think outside the box when developing lessons • Build upon previous taught skills • Teach college readiness
2: What behavioral strategies support student learning as perceived by education specialists and site administrators at exemplary non-public alternative education schools in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Orange Counties?	• Use her own personal experiences to reshape behaviors • Develop relationships with students

Participant H. The site administrator described the evolution of teaching strategies derived from an individualized approach. Further, he shared it was important to take the foundational knowledge of each student to develop student goals and an individualized program, and foster learning in a group setting. The goals were implemented in the classroom across content areas and in the learning environment. Participant H also attributed student learning to practical approaches, such as affording students the opportunity to generalize concepts learned into their natural environment or community.

Participant H appeared well-versed on behavioral strategies and stated he was a BCBA. For this reason, he emphasized the importance of using Applied Behavior Analysis and weekly consultations with the BCBA. All students had an individualized

behavior intervention plan as part of their IEP. Additionally, teachers were trained how to use reinforcement strategies within the context of academic lessons to assist with transitions to non-preferred subject areas. Individual reinforcements were based on contingencies and the frequency of behavior for each student.

In addition to individualized reinforcement, Participant H also shared the use of group-based contingencies as an effective practice. Further, he stated the staff worked in collaboration to change undesired behaviors of all students. Ultimately, he stated the effectiveness of the behavioral strategy was contingent upon how well it was implemented within the classroom setting. Table 10 presents themes generated from the interview.

Table 10

Themes Identified from Interview with Participant H

Research Questions	Themes Identified
1: What teaching strategies support student learning as perceived by education specialists and site administrators at exemplary non-public alternative education schools in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Orange Counties?	• Individualized instruction • Develop student academic goals • Practical approaches • Generalize concepts
2: What behavioral strategies support student learning as perceived by education specialists and site administrators at exemplary non-public alternative education schools in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Orange Counties?	• Consult with the BCBA • Individual reinforcements • Use of Applied Behavior Analysis • Behavior intervention plans • Group based contingencies • Consistent implementation of adopted strategies

Participant I. The education specialist shared the importance of direct instruction and peer tutoring to support student learning. Peer tutoring was a new strategy Participant I was using to determine if it increased accuracy and motivation.

Thus far, peer tutoring worked well for both students involved. In addition, it was noted the modeling helped students work more collaboratively together, whereas direct instruction was used when students were in small groups. Participant I explained this gave her an opportunity to work on individual academic goals. Small group instruction was offered daily for 30-60 minutes. The actual amount of small group time highly depended on the schedule for the day.

Participant I stated she collaborated with her fellow teachers regularly. Further, the teachers' teamed up for music lessons twice a week. Participant I shared there were rare opportunities to collaborate with colleagues because of the drastic differences in the population of students served in terms of grade level and disability.

Participant I explained she also used annotation and underlined important information to help students' scaffold and support student learning. She shared that "no matter where they are cognitively, the work is individualized." Although all students received the same worksheet, the assignment was projected and modified to meet each student's needs.

Participant I shared the importance of all students having a behavioral plan to support student learning. Staff were required to be knowledgeable about the plan, and target behaviors and reinforcements. Participant I shared she used individual and group incentives for the use of appropriate behavior. She also offered super citizen rewards for "stepping outside of yourself" and doing good deeds for staff or friends. Additionally, she offered social skills training. Students were currently learning how to be a good sport. Table 11 presents themes generated from the interview.

Table 11

Themes Identified from Interview with Participant I

Research Questions	Themes Identified
1: What teaching strategies support student learning as perceived by education specialists and site administrators at exemplary non-public alternative education schools in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Orange Counties?	• Individualized instruction • Direct instruction • Peer tutoring • Modeling • Small group instruction • Individual academic goals • Annotation • Underline important information
2: What behavioral strategies support student learning as perceived by education specialists and site administrators at exemplary non-public alternative education schools in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Orange Counties?	• Individual incentives • Group incentives • Behavioral plans • Citizen awards • Social skill training

Participant J. The site administrator shared the importance of utilizing multisensory techniques as an effective strategy to support student learning. She stated most students had difficulty attending and sitting for long periods. For this reason, several teachers "use student interest to build their lessons." For example, writing lessons were tailored to topics of high interest for some of the more reluctant writers. In math, the teachers used real-word applications and games to prompt an interest in learning.

Participant J explained they were fortunate to have low teacher to student ratios (5:1) with 10 students, 1 education specialist, and 1 assistant teacher. This enabled teachers to use differentiated and small group instruction to support student learning. The small group instruction was effective with students who had a difficult time attending to tasks in the larger setting. Teachers could easily redirect students to the assigned task in a smaller group setting.

Participant J shared having a schoolwide level system. The level system afforded each student privileges and access to preferred activities. In addition, each classroom developed their own classroom management annually or as needed based on their population of students. Reinforcement systems for each classroom were also tailored in the same manner. Staff and students were also provided cognitive social and self-regulatory training. This helped students learn how to recognize and regulate their emotions. Table 12 presents themes generated from the interview.

Table 12

Themes Identified from Interview with Participant J

Research Questions	Themes Identified
1: What teaching strategies support student learning as perceived by education specialists and site administrators at exemplary non-public alternative education schools in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Orange Counties?	• Multisensory techniques • Build instruction based on student interest • Individualized instruction • Provide real world applications • Games • Small group instruction • Differentiated instruction • Low student to teacher ratio
2: What behavioral strategies support student learning as perceived by education specialists and site administrators at exemplary non-public alternative education schools in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Orange Counties?	• Individual incentives • School wide level system • Earned autonomy • Reinforcement systems • Cognitive social training • Self-regulatory training

Participant K. The education specialist emphasized the importance of modeling and small group instruction as strategies to support student learning. Small group instruction offered opportunities for students to learn from one another and receive constant support in a smaller setting. In addition, many visuals were used to assist with scaffolding. Further, she explained most of her students were visual learners.

Participant K shared regarding behavior, she taught students self-regulatory skills. Every morning she reviewed behavioral expectations. The class rules were posted in the classroom and each student had an individual behavioral goal taped to the desk. Students earned individual tickets that could be used to purchase items from the craft store.

Lastly, Participant K explained she used a program called Zones of Regulation. There were four zones: red (heightened states of alertness and intense emotions), yellow (heightened state of alertness and elevated emotions), green (calm state of alertness and ready to learn), and blue (low state of alertness and down feelings). Students were taught how different feelings controlled the brain. Participant K shared this was an effective strategy because it taught students to express themselves and regulate feelings in an appropriate manner. Table 13 presents themes generated from the interview.

Table 13

Themes Identified from Interview with Participant K

Research Questions	Themes Identified
1: What teaching strategies support student learning as perceived by education specialists and site administrators at exemplary non-public alternative education schools in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Orange Counties?	• Modeling • Small group instruction • Scaffolding • Use of visual aids
2: What behavioral strategies support student learning as perceived by education specialists and site administrators at exemplary non-public alternative education schools in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Orange Counties?	• Individual incentives • Self-regulatory training • Individual behavioral goals • Ticket system • Zones of regulation

Participant L. The education specialist shared the importance of utilizing hands-on instruction to support student learning. Participant L explained students learned more with hands-on activities than from a worksheet. In addition, other teaching strategies she

attributed to student learning were checking for understanding and individualized instruction. Due to various grade levels, instruction was individualized for each student.

Participant L shared that positive reinforcement and zones of regulation were used as effective behavioral strategies to support student learning. In addition, students were taught coping skills to help deal with anxiety, frustration, and anger. Participant L explained staff were instrumental throughout the process due to their consistency in implementing each strategy.

Participant L shared students entered the class with self-defeating attitudes and negative thoughts about themselves. For that reason, she stressed the importance of teaching a growth mindset. She described students entering her class with a fixed mindset and transitioning to a growth mindset with independent goals. Participant L shared this helped students work up to their full potential. Ultimately, students learned that "sometimes things are hard, but we power through them and we get better." Table 14 presents themes generated from the interview.

Table 14

Themes Identified from Interview with Participant L

Research Questions	Themes Identified
1: What teaching strategies support student learning as perceived by education specialists and site administrators at exemplary non-public alternative education schools in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Orange Counties?	• Hands on instruction • Check for understanding • Individualized instruction
2: What behavioral strategies support student learning as perceived by education specialists and site administrators at exemplary non-public alternative education schools in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Orange Counties?	• Teach growth mindset • Positive reinforcement • Zones of regulation • Teach coping skills • Consistent implementation of strategies by staff

Data Analysis by Research Questions

Findings for Research Question 1

Research Question 1 was: *What teaching strategies support student learning as perceived by education specialists and site administrators at exemplary non-public alternative education schools in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Orange Counties*?

Methods used to help students learn core content and reach achievable goals were defined as teaching strategies. Teaching strategies helped identify the most effective learning modalities to instruct specific target groups. Common themes were determined by reviewing all responses for commonalities and the frequency in which participants referenced a particular theme. Any theme that yielded at least four or more responses was identified as a common theme, which equates to one third of the total respondents. Table 15 outlines the common themes of effective teaching strategies used by non-public schools to contribute to student learning, including the number of respondents referencing each theme and the number of references.

Table 15

Common Themes of Effective Teaching Strategies

Themes	Total Respondents	Frequency
Individualized Instruction	10	21
Modeling/Peer Modeling	5	15
Small Group Instruction	4	12
Build Upon Student Interest	4	9
Scaffolding	4	7

Common theme 1: Individualized instruction. Ten of the 12 participants expressed the importance of individualized instruction to support student learning. One participant shared, “I treat the individual according to their needs, which means I can

reduce the amount of questions on a page to individualize instruction as needed." Another participant shared, "We use individualized instruction to help students meet their unique needs."

Common theme 2: Modeling/peer modeling. Five of 12 participants expressed the importance of the using modeling or peer modeling to support student learning. One participant shared how students, "Learn from one another when they utilize peer modeling." Another participant stated, "We are fortunate because we have up to 10 students with one teacher and one assistant teacher, so we can really use modeling and peer modeling in the small group setting."

Common theme 3: Small group instruction. Four of the 12 participants indicated the use of small group instruction during their daily instructional time to support student learning. One participant shared, "I conduct whole group instruction to show students the correct way to complete the task. Then we break into their small groups and provide a lot of small group instruction to help them learn from each other." Small group instruction was also utilized to support students who struggled with focusing. Another participant shared, "The teacher or assistant teacher work with a really small group of students, which helps with kids who have a difficult time attending the task."

Common theme 4: Build upon student interest. Four of the 12 participants shared they built upon student interest as a teaching strategy to support student learning. One participant described her initial interaction with students and stated, "So it's like first we were learning about the students." Another participant shared, "There are students who prefer to use the computer to complete research or written assignments."

Common theme 5: Scaffolding. Four of 12 participants indicated they used scaffolding as a teaching strategy to support student learning. Scaffolding in education referred to a variety of instructional techniques used to enhance a student's understanding and build independence in the learning process. One participant indicated the use of "scaffolding or modifying the work to support student learning." Another participant indicated the use of a "multi-sensory approach to learning."

Findings for Research Question 2

Research Question 2 was: *What behavioral strategies support student learning as perceived by education specialists and site administrators at exemplary non-public alternative education schools in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Orange Counties*?

For this case study, effective behavioral strategies were defined as evidence- or research-based methods, approaches, and interventions that sought to prompt and control student behavior. Table 16 outlines the common themes of effective behavioral strategies used by non-public schools to contribute to student learning, including the number of respondents who references the theme and the frequency of themes.

Table 16

Common Themes of Effective Behavioral Strategies

Themes	Total Respondents	Frequency
Individualized Incentive Program	10	21
Positive Reinforcement/Point System	7	18
Group Incentive Programs	5	12
Behavior Intervention Plans	4	9
Consult with BCBA	4	6

Common theme 6: Individualized incentive program. Ten of 12 participants utilized individual incentive programs as a behavioral strategy to support student learning. Participants shared they use both group and individual incentive programs. Some individual incentive programs such as schoolwide level systems helped students earn preferred activities, choices, or autonomy. One participant indicated, "Students earn privileges to use technology, spend time with a preferred staff member, or autonomy to walk independently on campus without adult supervision."

Common theme 7: Positive reinforcement/point system. Seven of 12 participants utilized some form of positive reinforcement in the classroom to reshape behaviors. Positive reinforcements included the use of points, tickets, stars, and a monetary system. Participants shared that accumulation of these items were used to purchase items from the student store. One participant shared, "earning points also taught students the concept of saving." Another participant stated, "The frequency for reinforcement of positive behaviors depends on each student. It's seems all individualized." This theme differed from the individualized incentive program because the participants explained the reward system and students received something tangible in exchange for using the appropriate behavior.

Common theme 8: Group incentive program. Five of 12 participants used a group incentive program as a behavioral strategy to support student learning in the classroom setting. One participant stated, "They earn points as a team together, as a classroom, as well as individually." Another participant shared, "It's important that they learn to work as a team, so students also have an opportunity to earn group incentives."

Common theme 9: Behavior intervention plan. Four of 12 participants shared the integral role behavior intervention plans served in supporting student learning. At least three participants emphasized the importance of staff being knowledgeable about each individual plan and implementing strategies in the classroom setting consistently. One participant stated, "The effectiveness of the strategy depends on how well it's implemented in the classroom."

Common theme 10: Consult with the BCBA. Four of 12 participants indicated they consulted with the BCBA on effective behavioral strategies to implement in the classroom setting. One participant shared, "I work closely with the BCBA, and basically each student has their own individual schedule and learning system." This aligned with another participant who stated, "I work closely with our BCBA so we can combine behavioral strategies together with academics."

Key Findings

Key Findings: Effective Teaching Strategies

1. According to education specialist and site administrators, non-public schools used a variation of teaching strategies, but lacked the data to determine the effectiveness of strategies used.
2. Teachers needed to use a variety of teaching strategies to meet each student's individual needs. All non-public schools offered multi-grade level classes. One participant shared she had students in grades 7-11. Another participant shared, "We do have multiple grades within a classroom. So, for example k, 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 would all be in a class." Consequently, teachers were not able

to collaborate with teachers with similar grade level assignments and planned independently.

3. Regarding curriculum and teaching strategies, there was disparity in themes derived from each non-public school setting. Each non-public school was in a different county and adopted the curriculum from the district where the non-public school was geographically located.
4. In some cases, the education specialist interchangeably used teaching and behavioral strategies when responding to research questions and did not demonstrate a clear understanding of the difference between the two terms.
5. Two education specialist indicated they review previous lessons as a teaching strategy to support student learning prior to introducing new concepts.

Key Findings: Effective Behavioral Strategies

6. Although students were placed in non-public schools when their behavioral needs could not be supported on a comprehensive campus, only half of the participants indicated the use of behavioral intervention plans as a behavioral strategy.
7. Only three participants mentioned the use of evidence-based behavioral strategies.
8. All participating non-public schools had a BCBA on staff. However, only 6 of the 12 participants indicated they regularly consulted or were supported by the BCBA.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine and describe effective teaching and behavioral strategies used by exemplary non-public schools that contributed to student learning. Chapter IV included a presentation of the data, summary of common themes, and key findings. Chapter V presents a summary of the study and the researcher's final thoughts regarding significant findings, unexpected findings, conclusions, recommendations for further research, and closing thoughts and reflections.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter V summarizes this qualitative case study and includes a review of the purpose statement, research questions, methodology, population, and sample. Using the research questions as the primary framework and foundation for the case study, the researcher presents key findings. Additionally, Chapter V draws conclusions from the data to identify implications for action. Finally, the researcher shares personal reflections and final thoughts regarding the findings from the case study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore and describe the teaching and behavioral strategies exemplary, non-public alternative education schools used to support student learning as perceived by education specialists and site administrators at high-achieving, non-public alternative education schools in Los Angeles County, San Bernardino County, and Orange County.

Research Questions

1. What teaching strategies support student learning as perceived by education specialists and site administrators at exemplary non-public alternative education schools in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Orange Counties?
2. What behavioral strategies support student learning as perceived by education specialists and site administrators at exemplary non-public alternative education schools in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Orange Counties?

Methodology

The intent of this qualitative case study was to describe effective teaching and behavioral strategies used by exemplary non-public alternative education schools to support student learning. The study also explored the influence of education specialists and administrators in academic achievement levels of students in grades 4 to 8.

Population and Sample

The population for this case study was 3,073 non-public schools in California. Non-public schools were classified as private schools according to the CDE (2017). The researcher narrowed the broad continuum of private schools to those located in southern California in the following counties: Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Orange. Currently, 1,309 private school operate in the three counties collectively. The final sample included 3 non-public schools, with one from each county. A total of 12 participants were interviewed for this case study, 3 site administrators and 9 education specialists.

Major Findings

The first research question was designed to gather information regarding effective teaching strategies used by exemplary non-public schools, as perceived by site administrators and education specialists. The second research question was designed to gather information regarding effective behavioral strategies used by exemplary non-public schools, as perceived by site administrators and education specialists. Major findings were determined by any responses that impact the implementation of effective teaching and behavioral strategies or had an adverse effect on programming. The

following section summarizes major findings of this case study based on data collected from each research question.

Research Question 1

What teaching strategies support student learning as perceived by education specialists and site administrators at exemplary non-public alternative education schools in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Orange Counties?

Major Finding 1. One significant finding was at least six of the education specialists failed to clearly explain the difference between a teaching and behavioral strategy. Although, some strategies could be used to support students both behaviorally and academically, there were participants who required prompting to make a clear delineation between the two strategies. Effective implementation of strategies, involves education specialists having a fundamental understanding of the various strategies and knowledge about the appropriate use of strategies across content areas.

Less than 50% of the participants were knowledgeable about effective teaching strategies, compared to an astounding 80% of participants that used and demonstrated knowledge of effective behavioral strategies. For this reason, teachers were using behavioral strategies not proven to support student learning during instructional delivery. Chapter II outlined research-based and common teaching strategies used by alternative education school settings into three broad areas: instructional delivery, instructional supports, and monitoring and checking student progress (Rosenshine, 2007). Nonetheless, the data indicated education specialists who participated in the study were not using research-based, practical teaching strategies to support learning.

Two of the participants shared that Google classroom was the teaching strategy used to support student learning. According to Google (the developer), Google Classroom is merely a free web-based service designed to help schools create, distribute, and grade assignments more efficiently. The researcher concluded the emphasize was on managing behaviors effectively and consequently many of the education specialists were lacking knowledge of effective teaching strategies that supported student learning.

Major Finding 2. Nine education specialists and three administrators participated in the case study. However, none of the participants mentioned the state or district adopted curriculum, or identified how their strategies and curriculum aligned to the Common Core State Standards or teaching concepts. In fact, one participant shared she created her own curriculum. As a result, education specialist were providing worksheets at each student's instructional level opposed to providing them meaningful instruction and exposure to their grade level standards.

As previously mentioned, guidelines from the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) included students with special needs, with no exceptions based on the student's placement. One of the requirements of ESSA is that states provide challenging academic standards and assessments. California adopted the Common Core State Standards. Therefore, although it was not explicitly stated, students in non-public school settings should receive the same challenging and quality of academic instruction to the greatest extent possible. The findings did not reveal any substantial evidence of challenging, quality instruction.

Major Finding 3. Seven of the education specialist shared they had multi-grade-level classes. Despite the disparity in grade levels and student ages, less than one-third of

the education specialists shared the use of differentiated instruction as an effective instructional practice. Contrarily, at least two participants indicated they gave all students the same worksheet and modified the student work by reducing the amount of questions the student needed to complete.

The education specialists lacked the understanding of effective ways to service such a diverse population of students. There was no mention of creating lessons that targeted specific standards/concepts at various instructional levels to meet the needs of students. Many of the participants shared they used individualized instruction as an effective teaching strategy to support student learning. However, without additional staff to support intensive instruction, it was virtually impossible to provide individualized instruction.

Differentiated instruction was a method used to design instruction for a group of students based on their ability (Heathers, 1977). An example would be designing a lesson for groups of students at various instructional levels. Individualized instruction was described as a method of instruction designed to help a student make educational gains, based on his or her individual learning needs, interests, learning characteristics, or learning modality (Heathers, 1977). Regardless of the method used, education specialists were tasked with using the most appropriate method based on student needs, but there was no evidence of teaching methodologies.

Research Question 2

What behavioral strategies support student learning as perceived by education specialists and site administrators at exemplary non-public alternative education schools in Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Orange Counties?

Major Finding 4. Four participants shared they currently used behavior intervention plans as a strategy to support student learning. Most of the participants used an array of behavioral strategies. Behavior intervention plans were part of each students' IEP. Therefore, if a student's behavior resulted in a change of placement to a more restrictive placement, a behavior intervention plans is warranted.

All participants were using strategies or behavioral goals that could easily be embedded into a behavior intervention plan. Aside from behavioral strategies, most behavior intervention plans included the following information:

- Describes the behavior
- Triggers for the behavior
- Behavioral goals
- Frequency and duration of the behavior
- Incentives the student is likely to work for
- Communication system for staff and parents (Riffel, 2005)

This was a major finding because with the use of a behavior intervention plan, the participants could implement more proactive strategies to addressing behaviors, opposed to merely implementing interventions and being reactive.

Major Finding 5. Two of education specialist and one site administrator shared they collected behavioral data to determine appropriate behavioral strategies. The sense from the researcher was that behavioral strategies were used without having data to support the effectiveness of the strategies. Daily data collection and a weekly analysis of the data would provide staff with insight on the function of the behavior.

One commonly used data collection tool was an Antecedent Behavior Consequence data sheet, often referred to as an ABC chart. This enabled education specialists to determine the trigger for the behavior, identify the behavior, and keep accurate records of the consequence for the behavior. One participant shared she collected ABC data.

In the absence of data collection and analysis, it would be difficult to determine the effectiveness of the strategies used. The education specialists and site administrators stated, "We do whatever works." However, the information collected from the interviews failed to demonstrate the effectiveness of behavioral strategies based on data collection or other monitoring tools.

Conclusions

In this section, the researcher presents conclusions based on the common themes and major findings produced by each research question. The following conclusions summarizes the research findings with supporting information from the literature.

Conclusion 1

Site administrators and education specialists perceived the current multi-grade level classes as appropriate for students. Sometimes multi-grade classes were created intentionally. However, in alternative school settings, they were more commonly created based on student enrollment. The actual impact on each site primarily depended on the total number of students enrolled at each grade level. For example, two of the non-public school sites that participated in the case study had less than 75 students enrolled. The third non-public school had over 150 students enrolled and therefore more disparity in the grade levels existed.

Mason and Burns (1996) describe two different types of multi-grade classes: combination multi-grade and pedagogic multi-grade classes. Combination multi-grade level classes consisted of students in two or more grade levels taught by one teacher. Alternatively, pedagogic multi-grade levels consisted of students in two or more grade levels taught by a team of teachers focused on individually tailored learning.

Non-public alternative schools utilized combination multi-grade level classes, which created barriers in learning and the instruction provided. According to Mason and Burns (1997), the combination multi-grade class model potentially decreased the amount of support provided to teachers and structures in the educational environment. Consequently, teachers used various self-selected teaching methodologies and curricula that were not evidence based, and therefore lacked effective teaching and behavioral strategies (Bullock, 2007).

Conclusion 2

The site administrators and education specialists perceived monitoring individual goals as an effective teaching strategy. According to Geurin and Denti (1999), an important descriptor of effective alternative schools was successful integration of research and practice in areas such as assessment, curriculum, teacher competencies, and special education services. Goal development should be based primarily on assessments that clearly defines current student performance levels. Information gathered from assessments helped teachers determine when skills needed to be reviewed or retaught. Most academic assessments correlated with core subject standards and provided teachers with insight on how students were progressing towards mastery of grade level standards.

Assessments also provided critical information on each teachers' instructional practices as well (Geurin & Denti, 1999).

Despite the many benefits of using assessments, this was a missing component in non-public alternative schools and an unexpected finding. In the absence of accountability systems, it was virtually impossible to adequately measure the effectiveness of teaching and behavioral strategies. Therefore, any claims of effective teaching and behavioral strategies being used were nebulous.

Conclusion 3

Education specialists used teaching and behavioral strategies interchangeably in the classroom to support student learning. Thus, education specialists failed to demonstrate an understanding of effective teaching strategies based on data collection. Research supported the benefits of implementing effective teaching strategies and using a combination of research-based and research-validated strategies to provide a framework for an exemplar program (Kochhar, 1998). Rosenshine (2012) conducted extensive research on effective research-based teaching strategies. Yet, less than one-third of education specialists shared the use of practical or research-based teaching strategies. For this reason, they perceived some of the behavioral strategies as teaching strategies. This created an unnecessary barrier in teaching core subjects, such as writing that requires explicit instruction in the writing process. Several of the participants stated they had visual learners in their classroom. Yet, the education specialists failed to mention the use of manipulatives, number lines, or graphic organizers. These tools were commonly used in the educational field as a strategy to support learning in these specific areas.

Conclusion 4

Two site administrators and two education specialists expressed the value in having a BCBA on staff. A BCBA received additional training and was qualified to supervise other behavior analysts. As previously discussed, BCBAs had extensive knowledge and experience in Applied Behavior Analysis. Considering the population of students serviced and the fact most of the students were referred to the alternative education setting due to behavioral challenges, another unexpected finding was that merely one-third of the participants recognized the importance of having on-going consultation with a BCBA.

The site administrators and education specialists perceived the current behavioral strategies as effective. Yet, less than half of the total participants shared the use of evidence-based practices to reshape behaviors, such as Applied Behavior Analysis or consultation with the BCBA who is considered an expert in the area. Research indicated the underpinning cause of deficient teaching and behavioral strategies was reflected in teachers using various self-selected teaching methodologies and curricula that were not evidence-based (Bullock, 2007). The BCBA was trained to conduct descriptive and systematic behavioral assessments and interpret results. Hence, this makes their input and expertise instrumental in reshaping and monitoring student behaviors.

Implications for Action

Implication for Action 1

Site administrators and stakeholders must consider multi-grade groupings and the impact of the current model on overall student success. Initially, alternative schools developed in the mid-1960s because public schools lacked innovation and the ability to

teach the whole child. Alternative education schools adopted a business model mentality, meaning some of these schools merely collected district funding without being mindful of their responsibility to support students' academic, social, and developmental growth.

In the foreseeable future, the education specialists should be provided professional development opportunities in differentiated instruction to acquire skills on how to structure multi-grade classes. Another implication for action is restructuring the classes to identify the developmental differences in elementary, middle school, and high school students. The site administrators should meet prior to the next academic school year and reevaluate the current grade level groupings. Next, site administrators need to develop more appropriate classes based on age and progression in school grades/levels (elementary, middle school, and high school).

Implication for Action 2

Alternative education site administrators need to adopt an accountability or monitoring system to assist with analyzing the effectiveness of current instructional practices. First, site administrators need to develop assessments to be administered monthly and schedule times for the education specialists to review the data to improve student monitoring practices. Second, after the teachers analyze the data, the results should be used to drive instruction.

The site administrators should use the data to help education specialists monitor student learning. Simply using worksheets and reducing the amount of problems on the worksheet will not suffice. Education specialists should modify instruction based on assessment results and student needs, both as a group and individually. Noteworthy teaching strategies such as monitoring student progress, checking for understanding, and

providing reviews of previous lessons are forms of informal assessments to monitor student learning on a daily or weekly basis. In agreement with Stenger (2014), effective teachers facilitated the lesson, provided feedback, and offered opportunities for students to scaffold learning. Therefore, it is highly suggested education specialists implement these teaching strategies in their daily teaching practices.

Implication for Action 3

A variety of teaching strategies can be implemented in the classroom setting to support student learning. The site administrators need to provide on-going professional development in this area for the education specialists. Attainment of such skills will allow education specialists to enhance the learning experience and support students with different learning modalities, such as visual and kinesthetic learners. Research showed a multisensory approach was a valuable tool in supporting student learning, but only one education specialist reported using a multisensory approach.

Education specialists should receive professional development on multisensory approaches. After the education specialists receive training, site administrators should conduct observations in the classroom to provide the education specialists with feedback. The feedback would provide the education specialist with important information regarding the effectiveness of the teaching strategies used. Additionally, the on-going professional development and feedback from site administrators could increase education specialist knowledge in the use of effective teaching strategies to support student learning.

Implication for Action 4

More use of evidence- or research-based practices is needed. Specifically, the researcher recommends weekly consultation with the education specialists and BCBA to review behavior intervention plans and ensure they are decreasing the target behaviors. Consultation with the BCBA could also include development, revision, monitoring, and implementation of behavior intervention plans. Education specialists who serve students with more extreme behaviors should consult with the BCBA to determine the appropriateness of a Functional Behavioral Analysis (FBA) being conducted.

The BCBA can assist education specialist with collecting behavioral data, monitoring behavioral strategies and interventions, and developing and revising behavior intervention plans. Based on the data, the BCBA should ensure all students have an appropriate behavioral goal and behavior intervention plan. The BCBA should be required to collect behavioral data schoolwide and provide the site administrator with a monthly report that includes effective strategies/practices, overall increases and decreases in behaviors, and when most of the behaviors occurred (e.g., lunch, during transitions, after lunch).

Site administrators should use the reports for professional development and opportunities to collaborate with staff about effective behavioral strategies. There are three stages when addressing behaviors: a proactive approach, interventions, and a reactive approach. There are many benefits to being proactive in addressing challenging behaviors. Alternatively, without prompt responses to student behavior there is a likelihood that the behavior will manifest and often students are moved to alternative settings prematurely. After the site administrators and education specialists analyzed the

data, they should make the necessary changes on behavioral goals, behavior intervention plans, and behavioral strategies to support student learning.

Recommendations for Further Research

Alternative education schools offer a continuum of services to a diverse population of students. The term *dumping ground* was derived from research conducted by Clark (1968), who referred to alternative education settings as “cooling-out.” According to Snow (2009), this population was high-risk for social exclusion and to prevent further harmful effects, educators must be knowledgeable about service options in alternative settings to prevent students from lowering their expectations in response to social messages. In that event, the researcher highly recommends the following further studies:

1. Replicate the study with curriculum directors in districts with alternative educational school programs
2. Conduct a qualitative case study on accountability systems used by exemplary alternative education schools to monitor student learning and teaching practices
3. Conduct a quantitative study with alternative school teachers to determine the importance of teaching and behavioral strategies exemplary, non-public alternative education schools used to support student learning

Concluding Remarks and Reflections

Alternative education evolved to provide a continuum of services and options for students with varying circumstances, interests, and abilities (Lange & Sletten, 2002). Based on the rapid increase in alternative school settings in the last decade, a need exists

for alternative education schools on the continuum of placements. All students do not function or perform in the exact same setting. For this reason, specialized programs are needed that offer an alternative to traditional education settings. These programs should include effective teaching and behavioral strategies to support student learning. Consistent implementation of these strategies will help students continue to progress academically and eventually return to a traditional school setting with their non-disabled peers.

Research showed at-risk students were more successful in comprehensive, well-designed alternative programs (Morley, 1991). In an effort to dispel negative connotations of alternative education school as a dumping grounds (Clark, 1968, Snow, 2009, & Jeong-Hee, 2011), we must ensure students are placed in non-public schools that provide the essential components to support student learning. The researcher offers the following five essential components of a high-quality program to determine the merit of alternative education settings:

- Accountability systems
- On-going professional development on teaching and behavioral strategies for diverse learners
- Effective teaching and behavioral strategies based on data collection
- Regular consultation with a BCBA or individual that specializes in behavior
- Highly qualified staff members

The research conducted supports these five essential components that the researcher regards as pertinent implications for action. Full consistent implementation of the implications for action could assist in improving current programs and proving a

checklist of components that are instrumental in supporting student learning. Additionally, the researcher foresees a multitude of benefits in changing the culture and attitudes toward the quality of learning in alternative education schools.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A- SYNTHESIS MATRIX

	Instructional Delivery	Guided Student Practice	Instructional Support	Provide Models	Provide Scaffolds	Monitoring & Checking Student Progress	Monitor Independent Practice	Conduct Weekly & Monthly Review
Alibali, (2006)					■			
Anderson, (2008)								
Anderson & Burns, (1987)	■							
Blazer, (2014)								
Brabeck, Jeffrey, & Fry, (2016)		■						
Clark, (2009)		■						
Cornelius, (2015)						■	■	
Corno & Xu, (2004)								
Cunningham, (1991)							■	
Cunningham & Allington, (2007)							■	
Diller, (2016)							■	
Duffy, (2003)							■	
Edwards, (1997)								
Evertson, Anderson, Anderson, & Brophy, 1980).				■				
Farr, (2010)							■	
Fielding & Pearson, (1994)						■		
Fisher, Filby, Marliave, Cohen, Dishaw, Moore, & Berliner, 1978).								
Fisher & Frey, (2007)								
Geurin & Denti, (1999)			■					
Gibson, (2010)		■						
Goeke, (2008)				■				
Gobet & Campitelli, (2007)		■						
Good III, Simmons, & Kame'enui, (2001)					■			
Harvey & Goudvis, (2000)							■	
Killen, (2006)								
King, (1994)								
Knox, (2008)								
Kochhar, (1998)	■							
Lang, (2016)								
Lewis, (2016)							■	
Molenda & Russell, (2005)	■							
Morrison, (2010)								■

Oosterhof, Conrad, & Ely, (2008)								
Pressley, (2006)						■		
Pressley & Afflerbach, (1995)								
Pressley & Woloshyn, (1995)			■	■				
Rogoff, Turkanis, Bartlett, & Martinez-Pons, (2003)			■					
Rosenshine, (2007) & (2012)	■	■			■			
Rosenshine & Meister, (1992)					■			
Rupley, Blair, & Nichols, (2009)								
Schoen & Fusarelli, (2008)								■
Steele, (2005)								■
Stenger, (2014)		■						
Sweller, (1994)								
Tankersley, (2007)								
Tanner, (2013)								
Tobias & Duffy, (2009)			■					
van Gog, Paas, & Sweller, (2010)				■				
Wainer & Thissen, (2009)								
Wasserman, (2012)							■	
Weimer, (2013)								
Whitehurst, (2014)						■		

APPENDIX B – ALIGNMENT TABLE

Alignment of Interview Questions to Research Questions for Teachers

Research question	Corresponding interview questions
RQ 1: What are the teaching strategies as perceived by education specialist and site administrators at achieving non-public alternative education schools in LA county, San Bernardino county, and Orange county?	1. Please describe some of the effective teaching strategies you utilize in the classroom that support student learning? 2. What would you describe as the 2 or 3 of the most important classroom teaching strategies for supporting learning? a. Why do you perceive these as strategies as most important for supporting learning? b. Are these strategies used across core content areas or are they specific towards a specific content area (i.e. math or English Language Arts)? 3. Do you collaborate with other teachers regarding the use of different teaching strategies that contribute to student learning?
RQ 2: What are the behavioral strategies as perceived by education specialist and site administrators at achieving non-public alternative education schools in LA county, San Bernardino county, and Orange county?	1. Please describe some of the effective behavioral strategies you utilize in the classroom to support student learning? 2. What would you describe as the 2 or 3 of the most important behavioral strategies for supporting student learning? a. Why do you perceive these as strategies as most important for supporting student learning? b. Are these behavioral strategies used across core content areas or are they specific towards a specific content area (i.e. math or English Language Arts)? 3. Do you collaborate with other teachers regarding the use of different behavioral strategies that contribute to student academic achievement?

RQ 1 & RQ 2	Are there any other teaching or behavioral strategies or programs you would like to share with me that you perceive support student learning in your classroom?

Alignment of Interview Questions to Research Questions for Site Administrators

Research question	Corresponding interview questions
RQ 1: What are the teaching strategies as perceived by education specialist and site administrators at achieving non-public alternative education schools in LA county, San Bernardino county, and Orange county?	1. Please describe some of the effective teaching strategies you observe in your teachers classroom that support student learning? 2. What would you describe as the 2 or 3 of the most important classroom teaching strategies for supporting learning? a. Why do you perceive these as strategies as most important for supporting learning? b. Are these strategies used across core content areas or are they specific towards a specific content area (i.e. math or English Language Arts)? 3. Do your teachers collaborate with other teachers regarding the use of different teaching strategies that contribute to student learning?
RQ 2: What are the behavioral strategies as perceived by education specialist and site administrators at achieving non-public alternative education schools in LA county, San Bernardino county, and Orange county?	1) Please describe some of the effective behavioral strategies you observe in your teachers classroom to support student learning? 2) What would you describe as the 2 or 3 of the most important behavioral strategies for supporting student learning? a. Why do you perceive these as strategies as most important for supporting student learning? b. Are these behavioral strategies used across core content areas or are they specific towards a specific content area (i.e. math or English Language Arts)?

	3) Do your teachers collaborate with other teachers regarding the use of different behavioral strategies that contribute to student academic achievement?
RQ 1 & RQ 2	Are there any other teaching or behavioral strategies or programs you would like to share with me that you perceive support student learning in your teachers' classrooms?

APPENDIX C- INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

My name is Alana Hughes and I currently work for Ontario-Montclair School District as the Executive Director of the Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA). I'm a doctoral candidate at Brandman University in the area of Organizational Leadership. I'm conducting research to determine what effective teaching and behavioral strategies are used by exemplary non-public alternative education schools to improve or maintain student achievement. The four main components for the study are: (a) evolution of alternative education, (b) characteristics of alternative schools, (c) progressive discipline, (d) instructional strategies of alternative education settings, and (d) the role of alternative education programs to develop programs tailored to the unique needs of at-risk students.

I'm conducting approximately 60-minute interviews with education specialist and site administrators of exemplary non-public alternative education schools. The information you give, along with the others, hopefully will provide a clear picture of the effective teaching and behavioral strategies used by staff to improve or maintain student achievement in their organizations and will add to the body of research currently available.

Incidentally, even though it appears a bit awkward, I will be reading most of what I say. The reason for this to guarantee, as much as possible, that my interviews with all participating education specialist and site administrators will be conducted pretty much in the same manner.

Informed Consent (required for Dissertation Research)

I would like to remind you any information that is obtained in connection to this study will remain confidential. All the data will be reported without reference to any individual(s) or any institution(s). After I record and transcribe the data, I will send it to you via electronic mail so that you can check to make sure that I have accurately captured your thoughts and ideas.

Did you receive the Informed Consent and Brandman Bill of Rights I sent you via email? Do you have any questions or need clarification about either document?

We have scheduled an hour for the interview. At any point during the interview you may ask that I skip a question or stop the interview altogether. For ease of our discussion and accuracy I will record our conversation as indicated in the Informed Consent.

Do you have any questions before we begin? Okay, let's get started, and thanks so much for your time.

Education Specialist Interview Questions

Interview question 1: Please describe some of the effective teaching strategies you utilize in the classroom that support student learning?

Interview question 2: Do you collaborate with other teachers regarding the use of different teaching strategies that contribute to student learning?

Probe: Do you engage in any parallel planning? If so, tell me about how that looks and works for you.

Interview question 3: Please describe some of the effective behavioral strategies you utilize in the classroom to support student learning?

Interview question 4: Do you collaborate with other teachers regarding the use of different behavioral strategies that contribute to student academic achievement?
Probe: Do you collaborate with other teachers regarding a student's academic abilities or performance level?

Interview question 5: Are there any other teaching or behavioral strategies or programs you would like to share with me that you perceive support student learning in your classroom?

Site Administrator Interview Questions

Interview question 1: Please describe some of the effective teaching strategies or practices you observe in your teachers' classroom that support student learning?

Interview question 2: Do your teachers collaborate with other teachers regarding the use of different teaching strategies that contribute to student learning?
Probe: Do you engage in any parallel planning? If so, tell me about how that looks and works for your teachers.

Interview question 3: Please describe some of the effective behavioral strategies you observe in your teachers' classroom to support student learning?

Interview question 4: Do your teachers collaborate with other teachers regarding the use of different behavioral strategies that contribute to student academic achievement?
Probe: Is there a designated time for planning or professional learning community that discuss behavioral strategies?

Interview question 5: Are there any other teaching or behavioral strategies or programs you would like to share with me that you perceive support student learning in your teachers' classrooms?

APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

INFORMATION ABOUT: Effective Teaching and Behavioral Strategies Used by Exemplary Non-Public Alternative Education Schools

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Alana Hughes

PURPOSE OF STUDY: You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Alana Hughes, M.A., a doctoral student in the organizational leadership program at Brandman University. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore and describe the teaching and behavioral strategies exemplary, non-public alternative education schools used to support student learning as perceived by education specialists and site administrators at high-achieving, non-public alternative education schools in Los Angeles County, San Bernardino County, and Orange County. The study will attempt to further the research on the effectiveness of alternative education programs by identifying the characteristics and strategies used by exemplary non-public alternative education programs. Various studies have been conducted, but currently a uniform assessment tool does not exist. This study will help educators and parents select the most appropriate alternative school setting for students to receive educational benefit. The results of this study will also expand the knowledge of teachers on the most effective teaching and behavioral strategies to support learning.

By participating in this study, I agree to participate in a 30 to 45-minute one-on-one interview with the responsible investigator. The interview will be conducted in person or over the phone.

I understand that:

a) There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research. I understand that the investigator will protect my confidentiality be keeping any identifying information on a password protected computer, online using password protected applications (i.e. Google Drive), or in a locked filing cabinet only available to the researcher.
b) I understand that the interview will be audio recorded. The recordings will be available only to the researcher and the professional transcriptionist. The audio recordings will be used to capture the interview dialogue and to ensure the accuracy of the information collected during the interview. All information will be identifier-redacted and my confidentiality will be maintained. Upon completion of the study all recordings, transcripts and notes taken by the researcher and transcripts from the interview will be destroyed.
c) The possible benefit of this study to me is that my input will add to the research on how to best support classroom teachers in their learning. The findings will be available to me after the study. I understand that I will not be compensated for my participation.
d) If you have any questions or concerns about the research, feel free to contact Alana Hughes at hugh9202@mail.brandman.edu; or Dr. Doug DeVore (chair) at

ddevore@brandman.edu.

e) My participation in this research study is voluntary. I may decide to not participate in the study and I can withdraw at any time. I can also decide not to answer questions during the interview if I so choose. I understand that I may refuse to participate or may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the investigator may stop the study at any time. I also know that I may ask questions about the study before, during, or after the interview.

f) No information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent re-obtained. I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the "Research Participant's Bill of Rights." I have read the above and understand it and hereby consent to the procedure(s) set forth.

______________________________ ______________________

Signature of Participant Date

______________________________ ______________________

Signature of Principal Investigator Date

APPENDIX E- BILL OF RIGHTS

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Research Participant's Bill of Rights

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.
2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.
3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.
4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.
5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.
6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the study.
7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.
8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.
9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.
10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the Brandman University Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The Brandman University Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.

Brandman University IRB Adopted November 2013

APPENDIX F- LETTER TO ADMINISTRATOR

Alana Hughes
4020 Quartzite Lane
San Bernardino, CA 92407
hugh9202@mail.brandman.edu

January 15, 2018

Dear Administrator,

I am a doctoral student under the supervision of Dr. Doug Devore in the Graduate Studies at Brandman University, Ontario, CA. As part of my dissertation I am conducting research in the field of alternative education. The purpose of my study is to describe the teaching and behavioral strategies used by exemplary non-public alternative education schools to support student learning as perceived by education specialist and site administrators at exemplary non-public alternative education schools
Your campus was selected as an exemplary alternative education school that could contribute to studies of alternative education programs. I am asking your assistance in the Research Study by participating in an interview which will take 30-60 minutes and to recommend four of our educational specialist to also participate. The interview will be audio taped and set up for a time convenient for you. If you agree to participate in an interview, you may be assured that it will be completely confidential. No names will be attached to any notes or records from the interview. All data collected will be reported in the aggregate and no organizational or personal information will be linked in any way to the results of this study.

Your participation and approval would be much appreciated. All participants will be provided a Starbucks or Jamba Juice $5 gift card for participation in the study. I look forward to the opportunity to have you participate in this study. Upon your reply to this email I will follow up with you to schedule an interview and answer any questions. I will also provide you with a copy of the interview questions.

Thank you for your consideration,

Alana Hughes
Hugh9202@brandman.edu
909-477-1933

APPENDIX G: INTRODUCTION LETTER REQUESTING PARTICIPATION FROM EDUCATION SPECIALIST

Alana Hughes
4020 Quartzite Lane
San Bernardino, CA 92407
hugh9202@mail.brandman.edu

January 15, 2018

Dear Education Specialist,

I am a doctoral student under the supervision of Dr. Doug Devore in the Graduate Studies at Brandman University, Ontario, CA. As part of my dissertation I am conducting research in the field of alternative education. You were selected as a possible participant based on your experience teaching in the field of alternative education.

As a part of my study I am asking individuals to participate in an interview. Your principal has recommended you as a person to participate in this study. The interview will take approximately 45 minutes. If you agree to participate you will be provided a copy of the questions prior to the interview.

The decision to participate in this research project is voluntary. You may choose not to partake and may discontinue your participation at any time. Your participation would be much appreciated. All participants will be provided a Starbucks or Jamba Juice $5 gift card for participation in the study.

All information will remain confidential. Individual responses and all information that permit identification of you will be held in the strictest confidence. You can be assured that all data will be processed and at no time will individual responses or data be disaggregated.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please reply to this email and I will follow up with you to schedule an interview and answer any questions.

Thank you for your consideration,

Alana Hughes
Hugh9202@brandman.edu
909-477-1933