




Special Education Teachers' Challenges and Coping Mechanisms in Behavior Management of Learners with Autism

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Doi: 10.23918/ijsses.v12i2p37

Abstract: Behavior Management for children with autism in special education classrooms has been challenging for teachers. They need to find ways to deal with these learners and educate them. This study delved on the special education teachers' challenges in behavior management in handling learners with autism. Using a qualitative transcendental phenomenological design, it focused on the commonality of experience of the four special education teachers who are handling learners with autism in special education classrooms in the Division of Lanao del Norte, Philippines. The findings showed that behavior management was deemed very important for the target participants in the study. It served as a prerequisite to teaching academic lessons to the learners with autism. The participants have shared their experiences on some challenges in behavior management of learners with autism such as the need for assistant teacher in the classroom, the need for instructional materials, and the insufficient knowledge on handling children with autism. Moreover, the teachers dealt their encountered challenges such as establishing rules and routines, ignoring the tantrums of children with autism, and observing the children with autism. The more experience the teachers had in handling children with autism, the more they developed understanding towards the child, which lead to more success in behavior management of the learners. The study's findings can shed light to teachers and school administrators who have encountered problems in handling children with autism in their classroom.

Keywords: Special Education, Autism, Behavior Management, Challenge, Coping Strategy

1. Introduction

Among the different roles of a teacher in the classroom, the most important one is being a manager in the classroom (Putri et al., 2019). Effective teaching and learning might not be possible if the classroom is poorly managed. When the learners are misbehaving and are disorderly, chaos becomes the norm. In these kinds of situations, not only do the teachers suffer, but also the learners. In a way, teaching becomes more challenging, and the learners will learn lesser than they should. In contrast, well-managed classrooms create an environment that flourishes a healthy teaching and learning process (Sumi & Aruna, 2011).

Received: 27.11.2024

Accepted: 15.04.2025

Naparan, G., Deloria, O., & Naparan, J. (2025). Special Education Teachers' Challenges and Coping Mechanisms in Behavior Management of Learners with Autism. *International Journal of Social Sciences & Educational Studies*, 12(2), 37-53.

Behavior management of learners in the classroom is one of the important abilities a special education teacher should possess (Göğebakan & Sazak, 2022). It is a known fact that most learners with autism exhibit behavior problems that could range from diminutive behaviors to harmful ones (Degli Espinosa et al., 2020).

One of the essential skills for any teacher, especially teachers who are handling students with behavior problems, is effective classroom organization and behavior management (Hinggo et al., 2022; Oliver & Reschly, 2010). The results have further emphasized that it should be required, even during the pre-service level, that there be a comprehensive teacher preparation in all components of classroom organization and behavior management (Pokhriyal, 2023).

The Individuals with Disabilities Educational Act of 2004 defines autism as a developmental disability that mainly affects the verbal and non-verbal communication of a child (Hendricks, 2011). Autism comes with several characteristics and problems that impede the child's development and learning (Pabatang & Naparan, 2023). One of which is the behavior aspect of the child. All children have challenging behavior, but it is more apparent in children with autism (CWA) (Koegel et al., 2011).

Some implications for problem behavior in CWA are more intrusive placements or lesser community exposure, varying quality of daily services, the risk for abuse, greater use of psychotropic medication, psychological toll on service staff, and psychological toll on family members (Manente et al., 2010). Misbehaviors from the learners are viewed as problematic for the teachers as they cause distress for them disrupting the effectiveness and continuous flow of teaching. Some SPED teachers spend more time in dealing with misbehavior of CWA in the classroom (Sun & Shek, 2012). For special education (SPED) teachers, each occurrence of misbehavior would mean having to comply with paperwork to record the particular incident, aside from having to deal with or address the problem behavior of the child (Katsafanas, 2006).

Among learners with special educational needs, the CWA are often stereotyped for exhibiting misbehaviors and stereotypical behaviors such as rocking, clapping, hand flapping, self-injurious behaviors, and yelling that may disrupt the teaching-learning process in the classroom (Hampton et al., 2021). Given the effects of these behaviors, teachers are spending more time on addressing the behavior problems that take away from instructions, compromising learning for both the learner who misbehaved and the rest of the class (Abebe & Hailemariam, 2007). Despite that, there are only a few supports that the SPED teachers get to manage the behavior of CWA (Mitchell et al., 2019).

The management of disruptive behavior problems is a common concern for many schools. In recent years, behavior difficulties in schools have increased, teachers seem to be unprepared to deal with the problem and the standard classroom management strategies teachers rely on does not appear to be working. Behavior difficulties among CWA, which were linked to their having difficulty with interpreting social signals and cues, along with self-management and coping skills. It further states that the schools must ensure that general and SPED teachers should be prepared to effectively address the behavior problems of CWA as there is an increasing prevalence of CWA enrolled in schools (Goodrow, 2016). Teachers, who were interviewed, have acknowledged the need to further prepare the SPED

teachers to effectively teach CWA. Problems that include misbehaviors were encountered in teaching CWA (Sun & Shek, 2012).

In the Philippine setting, one SPED teacher in Makati City was interviewed about his experience in teaching learners with autism. The teacher expressed that these children were very affectionate and fun-loving, but at times, there were experiences encountered particularly in dealing with the misbehaviors like when the CWA started climbing on tables and would keep on shouting. The teacher was oftentimes confused and frustrated to the point of breaking down into tears and telling the colleague about quitting (Lagman, 2019).

The literature does not explore well the behavior management of children with autism in the classroom. In particular, there is a lack of studies focusing on newly employed SPED teachers. Most of the Special Education centers in the Division of Lanao Del Norte were established not more than ten years. During division level seminars, SPED teachers often raised their concerns on managing the behavior of CWA. Most of these teachers who have expressed their concerns about the issue were teachers who are handling CWA. The experiences shared by the SPED teachers were varying. With an important educational matter like behavior management along with the cited scenarios in the global, international, national, and, most especially, in the local setting, the researchers realized the need to study on the challenges encountered by SPED teachers to manage behavior problems of CWA such noncompliance, verbal disruption, breaking or taking other person's things, attacking other people, always being out of the seat, or teasing the classmates (Hyman et al., 2020; Oliver et. al., 2011). This research is anchored on choice theory of William Glasser that minimizes coercion and aims to build positive environment to students in managing them (Glasser, 1999). The choice theory minimizes coercion as it aims to build a positive learning environment with the learners. Thus, this research explored the SPED teachers' challenges and strategies in behavior management of CWA.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Behavior Management of Children with Autism

The behavior management focuses on how to address the misbehavior. It stresses the teacher's need to manipulate the environment inside the classroom in such a way so that the teacher can control the situations that could trigger misbehaviors (Özben, 2010). Behavior management, as suggested by Hendricks (2011), should foremost include modifying the environment by planning on means to avoid events and antecedents that could trigger the occurrence of misbehaviors. In other words, it should be designed in order to proactively prevent the misbehavior from occurring. Furthermore, the study also extrapolated that it is critical to ensure that SPED teachers are well-equipped and prepared to teach CWA, as these learners are tremendously unique from the others. They should be knowledgeable on the behavior characteristics and how they impact the learning, by being familiar with research and theories that suggest best practices to address behavior needs of CWA.

According to studies related to classroom management, the most common behaviors requiring intervention are those disruptive and aggressive behaviors, which include noncompliance, verbal disruption, breaking or taking other people's things, attacking other people, always being out of the seat,

or teasing the classmates, as these are the misbehaviors typically seen in teacher's observation reports (Hyman et al., 2020; Oliver et al., 2011). Experiences of behavior difficulties are common for CWA as they may have difficulty in terms of their social skills, self-management, and coping skills (Van Der Steen et al., 2020). Recent research states that the number of CWA being diagnosed has increased, and with that, the schools must ensure that general and special education teachers are prepared to teach CWA effectively and be able to cope well with experiences related to behavior management of these children (Sun & Shek, 2012).

Behavior management is an important aspect that should be known and understood by each special education teacher (Adeghe et al., 2024). Teachers are able to cope with the students' behavior provided with a behavior management module (Noor Aini & Norhafizah, 2015). Teachers who are facing with such issues are burdened by mood disorders and this hindered them from a good teaching performance (Sha'arani & Tahar, 2017). This calls for a more focused study on the proper behavior management of the CWA as it is the behavior problem that should be addressed first before the teacher could even begin to teach the learners.

Behavior problem of children is one of the factors that increase the stress level of both the teacher and the learners in the classroom. It can disrupt the flow of lessons and the process of learning. Such problem can affect the child's performance as it actually obstructs the child's learning opportunities (Olivar & Naparan, 2023). The occurrence of misbehaviors diverts the flow of the class as the teacher's attention and priority moves from the delivering the lesson to managing and regulating the misbehavior of the child, which causes the momentum of learning to discontinue (Parsonson, 2012).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA 2004) defines autism as a developmental disability, which significantly affects verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction. Other characteristics include repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to change, and unusual responses to sensory experiences (Hendricks, 2011).

Known for its uniqueness, there can be no general descriptions for all individuals with autism, as the symptoms vary in each child (Lamy et al., 2020). It includes impairment across all learning areas, having the three most common features namely, impaired communication (verbal and gestural), social functioning, and behavior variability (i.e., restricted and repetitive activities). Other than that, autism is also associated with sensory and perceptual deficits, intellectual disability, and behavior problems (Hixson et al., 2008).

CWA exhibit various types of behavior in and out of the classroom. The most common behaviors observed in most of CWA are rocking, clapping, hand flapping, self-injurious behaviors, and yelling (Hyman et al., 2020). Although it should be noted that not all children are the same and not all behaviors are present in each CWA just as each of their needs vary according to the behaviors that they exhibit (Bice, 2009).

Aside from that, CWA are also identified for their stereotypical behaviors, which are repetitive motor behaviors. These are atypical behaviors that they do for a certain amount of time, and are not due to use of substance or medical condition. Examples of stereotypical behaviors of CWA are body rocking,

repetitive hand movements like hand flapping, spinning and/or fixating at spinning objects (Matheis et al., 2017).

When specific types of misbehaviors are considered, age-related patterns tend to be more varied among CWA. An example given, which focused on self-injurious behaviors, showed that younger individuals have prevalent behaviors of head-banging and finger-chewing while older individuals have prevalent behaviors of cutting and skin-picking. In another study, which focused on gender differences, it was noted that males are more likely to display aggressive behaviors than females (Matheis et al., 2017).

Situations such as aggression and self-injury could also be observed among CWA. These misbehaviors are not only dangerous and/or disruptive, but are also major causes of impediments to child's opportunities for learning and socialization. With that, much research has been conducted to understand the nature of the behaviors of CWA and how to manage them (Matheis et al., 2017). Self-injurious behaviors include various repetitive behaviors like arm-biting, head-banging, and hair-pulling. Some CWA may display these kinds of behavior with no apparent reason at all, thus, it poses significant risk in harming themselves (Curtin et al., 2020). The reason behind self-injurious behaviors is not completely understood. CWA displaying these behaviors could serve different purposes like for communication, social interaction, and self-regulation (Soke et al., 2018).

In addition, CWA display more challenging and frequent misbehaviors than typically developing children (Koegel et al., 2011). If not addressed properly, the misbehaviors will not be corrected and the CWA will continue engaging on that misbehavior (Factor et al., 2019). Given that, the SPED teachers handling CWA tend to encounter more situations related to behavior management than regular teachers.

The literature showed autistic behavior, such as stereotypical, aggressive, and self-injurious behaviors, to be disruptive, especially in the classroom environment (Sadler, 2019). The SPED teacher participants in the study had different perceptions in dealing with disruptive behaviours, although not much study specifically about dealing with and addressing autism behaviors in the classroom setting is yet available up to the present. The literature gathered shows that, as of the present, there is no sufficient research on the subject matter. In addition, the lack of focus on the behavior management of CWA in a SPED classroom as well as studies focusing on SPED teachers handling CWA are some of the limitations of the past studies, which compelled the researchers to conduct a study on this phenomenon.

3. Methods

3.1. Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative Transcendental phenomenological design of Moustakas (1994) as it focused on the experiences of SPED teachers handling CWA. There was a continuous reflection upon interpreting the participants' experience, in order to move beyond partiality of previous understanding and intervention with regards to behavior management of CWA (Suddick et al., 2020). The Transcendental phenomenological design was deemed the most fitting for this study for it has catered to the different experiences of SPED teachers handling CWA. In addition, this approach aimed to arrive at a commonality among the defined and lived experiences of the SPED teacher participants. The Transcendental phenomenology objectively explored the teachers' experiences in handling CWA. The

design started with bracketing the researchers' biases then exploring the depth of the experiences of the research participants' experiences aiming at presenting the invariant structure of their experiences.

3.2 Research Environment

The study took place in selected schools under the Division of Lanao del Norte, Philippines, that cater to SPED classes with CWA. The SPED classes have only been established, and there are learners with autism, which calls for the need to conduct the study.

3.3 Research Participants

The research participants were the four SPED teachers handling learners with autism in schools catering SPED classes under the Division of Lanao del Norte, Philippines. These SPED teacher participants have had at least three years of experience handling learners with autism. These teachers were from rural schools. Participant 1 is a 49-year-old female SPED teacher and a holder of a diploma in Master of Arts in Education major in special education. Participant 2 is a 26-year-old female SPED teacher with no master's degree. Participant 3 is a 37-year-old female SPED teacher with no master's degree. Participant 4 is a 51-year-old female SPED teacher with no master's degree. Furthermore, one parent also was interviewed to validate the sharing of the teacher participants especially that parents need to deal the CWA at home.

3.4 Research Instrument

The primary research instrument for this study was the researchers, aided by an interview guide. An interview involves verbal communication between the researchers and the participants; it is an important data gathering technique. The interview guide contained a total of nine questions, consisting an engaging question, seven exploratory questions, probing questions, and an exit question. The interview guide allowed the research participants to discuss the different challenges they encountered in terms of behavior management of CWA, as well as how they addressed the misbehaviors of CWA. As they shared their challenges, the researchers probed their sharing and allowed them to discuss further their experiences.

3.5 Data Analysis

The data were analysed using thematic analysis, a method used for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns or themes within the data. After transcribing the interviews, the researchers followed the Phenomenological data analysis of Moustakas (1994). The researchers took note of all relevant expressions then reducing them to invariant constituents. They then clustered them to create core themes. Furthermore, they constructed structural descriptions and synthesized them into expressions. They then developed themes namely no or lack of assistant teacher, need for instructional materials, and insufficient background knowledge on the CWA and themes for behavior management strategies such as establishing rules and routines, ignoring, and observation capturing the essence of the participants' experiences.

3.6 Ethical Considerations in Research

The researchers adhered to the following principles in research ethics, which were strictly observed upon the conduct of this study: informed consent and voluntary participation, data security, confidentiality, and request for documentation. The researchers asked the research participants to sign the informed consent form before they were interviewed. Before they signed, the conditions for participating in the study were explained to them. The researchers also adhered to the confidentiality of the shared data. The researchers also anonymized the participants to safeguard their identity.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1 Challenges Encountered in Behavior Management of Children with Autism

The information gathered from the interview showed that the SPED teachers encountered some challenges as part of their experiences in behavior management of their learners with autism. The sharing of the participants included the following: (1) No or Lack of Assistant Teacher, (2) Need for Instructional Materials, and (3) Insufficient Background Knowledge on the CWA.

No or Lack of Assistant Teacher. One of the sub-themes that came up during the discussion on the challenges encountered in behavior management of CWA was the lack of assistant teacher for the SPED teachers handling learners with autism. Three of the participants saw the lack of assistant teacher as a challenge to behavior management of CWA. This sub-theme was clearly conveyed through the following statements of the participants:

One of the problems is, for us SPED teachers, there is supposed to be a limit to the number of students with disability that you are teaching. In my case, I handle lots of students with autism. So, what happens when they simultaneously have tantrums? I also have experienced wherein two of my students were both having tantrums because they got into a fight. It was really difficult to manage. So, there is supposed to be an assistant teacher, especially for the big schools like ours, because we really cater lots of students, who are not only from within the locality. – P1

For me, I handle a class with mixed disabilities so even until now it is still difficult for me since there are more enrollees, so my number of students keep on growing and adding up. Even an assistant would be helpful so that while I try to regulate the student who's having the tantrums, the assistant can be left to tend to my other students. – P3

What I realized, so far is the lack of teachers. We were only two teachers who are handling the pioneering SPED class. It so happened that I was tasked to handle all the learners with autism, including learners with HI, and the other teacher handles purely learners with ID. You will be really stressed, if someone has tantrums, because you are the only person who will make them settle down; if only there's someone who can assist. It would have been ideal if the other students are well-behaved in their seats while you are busily attending to the student who's having tantrums. They would run around and become loud because their teacher is busy with the one child who is having tantrums. – P2

The statements showed that the SPED teachers encountered challenges in behavior management of CWA because of the lack of an assistant teacher inside the classroom. The participants stated that behavior management of CWA could be more manageable if there was another person who could assist them especially when the attention and tasks are divided inside the classroom, like when one student is having temper tantrums, the other students can be entrusted to the teacher's assistant.

A class of children with autism required teacher assistants. Although, the SPED teachers facilitated the classes for the CWA, the teacher assistants however may have important tasks such as assisting on the lessons and personal care of the learners. Under the SPED teacher's supervision, the assistants were often tasked to develop independent living skills, managing the learners' behaviors, etc. (Alberta Learning, 2003).

Through the theoretical lenses of Glasser's Choice Theory, the need for assistant teacher is beneficial for the behavior management of the CWA. This helped regulate task management inside the classroom. Therefore, the SPED teacher could provide more attention to each of the learners, especially their individual needs, in order to have an environment more conducive for learning.

Need for Instructional Materials. The participants shared about their needs for instructional materials as one of the sub-themes that came up during the discussion about the challenges encountered in behavior management of CWA. Three of the participants viewed the need for instructional materials as one of the challenges in behavior management of CWA. These were conveyed in the following statements:

It would be also helpful if we have materials which would be useful especially for behavior management. A behavior chair alone would even suffice because, in my experience at the private school, the learners with autism were really seated in behavior chairs to have lesser chance for them to hurt other students. – P2

It is also very important that you use manipulatives, and then put in your mind that students with autism, especially boys, are physically strong. With our small frames, we cannot physically stop them when they have tantrums. So, when you say behavior management especially for autism, you should really have a behavior chair. Lucky for me, I took the initiative to provide behavior chairs, but as far as I now, the other schools still do not have that. – P1

We also need materials in order to manage the behavior of students with autism like behavior chair for autism. Because as I observed from the classes of other schools, behavior chairs are really present in their classrooms. The behavior chair can really be helpful since the use of it can instantly separate them from one another. So, no one can easily bother them – P4

According to the participants, one of the challenges they encountered in behavior management of CWA was the need for material resources to aid in their behavior management. They mentioned behavior chair as an important tool for behavior management as it helped restrain the CWA from possibly hurting other classmates during temper tantrums and display of aggressive behaviors.

There should be material resources readily available in order to aid the SPED teacher's behavior management of their CWA. The use of these materials such as behavior chairs could easily provide more stability for the SPED teachers to regulate the behaviors inside the classroom. They expressed that using behavioural chairs are strategic in not only maintaining order inside the classroom, but also in preventing misbehaviors to occur.

Material resources that helped in behavior management of children with autism included behavioural chairs, behavior charts, sensory materials, etc. These tools, which helped facilitate active monitoring on the learners' appropriate and inappropriate behaviors, should be made available for use in classrooms for children with autism (Boser et al., 2014).

Insufficient Background Knowledge on the Children with Autism. The last sub-theme that was highlighted upon the discussion of challenges encountered in behavior management of CWA was the insufficient background knowledge on the CWA. This sub-theme was conveyed in the following statements:

For me, you really need to be patient, as a teacher. Referral from other schools could be different; it only shows the surface details. We cannot entirely get the full background information of the child. You need enough time to observe what truly causes their temper tantrums. My experience is usually on students who are newly transferred because they are still getting familiar with their new teacher. So, that would be a time when the tantrums and behaviors show. But with enough time, you get to adjust to them eventually. – P3

I really find it challenging especially when I have new students because I am not yet aware of their behavior... You really need to get to know your students with autism because if you do not have enough background information, especially about their behavior patterns, it will be really difficult to manage the behavior. If you are aware about their background, your teaching will be okay. – P4

It was stressful at first, especially if he/she is a new student. As a teacher, I would not immediately know what intervention I should give when the student has tantrums. – P1

I was not aware that he hates it when others borrow or touch his things, he would usually have tantrums. – P2

The results showed that it was important for SPED teachers to know about the behavior of the CWA they were handling so that misbehaviors or inappropriate behaviors would be avoided or lessened. In addition, knowing enough about the learners was truly helpful for the SPED teachers in providing the appropriate interventions that were effective for each child (Moloney & Saltmarsh, 2016). Acquiring general background information about the learners, upon transfer, was important. This provided the SPED teachers foresight about the learners, especially on their behaviors and on how to properly address their inappropriate behaviors (De La Cruz, 2020).

Referral of a child with special needs required that the teachers have background information on the child during the beginning process. The teachers needed general knowledge on the child's history, the

nature of the disability, strengths and weaknesses, behavior patterns and what behavior interventions are proven effective (Alberta Learning, 2003; Mohammed et al., 2020). The data showed that the teachers should be well-informed about their learners' background information in order for them to tend to each of their individual needs. Things such as what the learners like or dislike should be accounted for in order to avoid their having temper tantrums in the classroom.

4.2 Strategies in Behavior Management of Children with Autism

The information gathered from the interview showed that aside from the challenges, the participants had also positive experiences when it comes to successful behavior management of CWA. Following the different challenging behaviors of the CWA, the participants conveyed different strategies on how each of them addressed behavior problems accordingly. This phenomenon of successful behavior management experiences was presented through the strategies the participants used in behavior management of CWA namely: (1) Establishing Rules and Routines, (2) Ignoring, and (3) Observation.

Rules and Routines. Establishing rules and routines or routinary activities was one of the sub-themes that came up from interviewing the participants. The theme came up from the discussion on effective strategies in behavior management of CWA, in which all of the four participants mentioned establishing rules and routines in their classroom as part of their behavior management to CWA. Rules and routines were conveyed in the following statements:

We have routinary activities which I post in a chart, complete with pictures. First thing is removing their shoes and socks upon arriving in the classroom, then flag we do the ceremony. After they are seated, we do sensory massage for at least three minutes. Then they would do their working activities for both fine motor and academics. After that, we pray, then, recess. Part of their routine during recess is that they get utensils. After eating, they clean up and go home. – P1

We follow a specific routine that we established during the start of the school year. Part of the routine is incorporating strategies that would help discipline them in their behavior, like during playtime. Since there are only few toys, we have to set rules in order to avoid chaos and fights. – P4

I always make sure I stick to our routine. For me that is my best strategy in maintaining good behavior management for my children with autism. It is really best to follow routine for our children with autism because they really love having a routine. They like to see a pattern on everything. By having a routine, they can see a pattern on what they would do every day and what they should expect to do when they go to school. – P2

You have to stick to the routine because once the routine is not followed it would definitely dampen their mood. – P3

The strategy for that is to establish routine for the CWA. Once they get used to the routine, you really need stick to that starting from the moment they enter the classroom until they go home. It is also good to have a routine since CWA usually prefer to know what

expectations they should have for the next activities. As a teacher, it would help us to have continuous flow in our class because if there are interruptions, that would only give them a chance to misbehave and create chaos. – P4

The statements from the participants showed that it is important to not only establish rules and routines for the CWA, but also to make sure that the SPED teacher really sticks to them. The rules and routines were set during the initial start of every school year, wherein the teachers can introduce the specific daily tasks to the CWA until it became part of their routinary activities.

The special education teachers held out the fact that establishing rules and routines was also very important as part of behavior management inside the classroom (Jung & Lee, 2020). To the special education teachers, rules and routines were helpful to achieve how a teacher expects the learners to act and behave in the classroom. In the same way, having rules and routines highly benefitted the CWA for they helped alleviate the confusion and provided structure across activities throughout the day.

Rules and routines were made in order to lessen the occurrence of problem behaviors among children with autism. Not having a simple structure to follow could overwhelm the CWA, which could make them confused on what the teacher expects of them or could cause them to exhibit behavior problems when they became frustrated with not being able to simply finish their task (Grant & Crossen, 2014).

Ignoring. Ignoring was one of the sub-themes that came up during the discussion on some strategies for good behavior management. Three of the participants in the study stated that they viewed ignoring as also an important strategy as it can be very effective in behavior management for some CWA. These were manifested in the following statements:

It is a case-to-case basis. I have some students who would easily calm down if you ignore.
– P2

Ignore child until she calms down, because the temper tantrums would only get worse the more you continuously approach and try to comfort her. She would eventually become okay. – P3

Sometimes, you should just ignore them because there are some students who can calm down faster on their own if you leave them. For your intervention, sometimes, you have to ignore, comfort, distract, or totally stop them if there is already self-harm or danger towards others. – P1

The participants used ignoring on the CWA whom they deemed would be more resistant if they approach them through other means. It was notable that they decided to use ignoring on these particular CWA as a result of their constant observation and adjustment of their approaches and interventions to the behaviors of these children.

Taken from the interview with a parent of one of the CWA, the parent shared that the more effective strategy to handle their child is by using ignoring. Whenever the child displays inappropriate behaviors because the child often used that as a tactic to seek attention from people around him. In the long run, it

is much possible for special education teachers to achieve a successful behavior management to CWA. The information gathered from the participants' experiences conveyed that there were many strategies in managing the behavior of CWA whether direct or indirect. Planned ignoring was the much appropriate strategy in dealing with the misbehavior since it was effective means for them to calm down (Ausderau et al., 2019). By using planned ignoring, the teachers could avoid the possibility of encouraging those inappropriate behaviors, which could be used by the CWA in order to gain attention (McLay et al., 2019; Ward, 2003).

Glasser's Choice Theory stated that the students could not be forced to learn, nor can they be forced to behave in a certain manner. What the teachers needed to do is to teach the learners on how to make better choices with regards to how they should behave (Quality Educational Programs, 2009). Using ignoring as behavior management strategy made the learners become more aware of their own behavior.

Observation. One of the sub-themes that came up from the interview on effective behavior management was about observation. The participants shared that they usually conducted classroom observations to their CWA. These were conveyed in the following statements:

If you are the teacher, it is important that you observe the students during the start of the school year so that you will know what causes tantrums in your students in order to avoid misbehaviors. –P4

You really need to know them one by one so that you would know how to deal with each one of them. In order to do that, you need to observe first. That is why, as special education teachers, it is an important skill for us to be vigilant and critical -minded because not all behaviors of our students can be seen by our eyes. There could be underlying reasons why your student is having tantrums, which you need to analyze. – P2

You need to constantly observe their mood, especially since our students have different characteristics. You need to know the reason why they are having tantrums and how you should intervene to make them okay. Once you understand their mood, you as a teacher would be the one to adjust on how you handle each one of them. – P3

Always observe them and also their surroundings because you are the person who paves the way to their comfort inside the classroom so that they would not misbehave and have tantrums. It is important for you to be observant with their behavior because the more you know what triggers them, the more control you would have inside the classroom since you can then easily avoid situations that could trigger them having tantrums. – P4

Results from the interview with the participants conveyed that there was a necessity to perform constant observation inside the classroom for them to properly handle situations when there were behavior problems of the CWA. The SPED teachers needed to avoid situations that may trigger CWA's behavior problems. The participants constantly did behavior observations as means to know their CWA on a strategic manner. This way, they found out about what are the things that they disliked and found uncomfortable, which caused the behavior meltdowns (De La Cruz, 2020).

In connection to Glasser's Choice Theory, classroom observations were necessary in order for the SPED teachers to adjust the learning environment into a more conducive one for the CWA. This helps prevent the occurrence of misbehaviors as the SPED teachers will have noted the specific factors that become triggers to the misbehaviors of CWA.

The findings of the study have a significant implication to the SPED practitioners. The SPED teachers can benchmark those shared strategies of the participants for them to use in handling CWA in their classroom. Although, each classroom is unique but those experiences of SPED teachers can still provide them with some inputs and alternatives on what to do.

The findings also allowed the policy makers to help the SPED teachers in the Philippines classrooms. They can craft policies and guidelines that will help SPED teachers handle with ease the CWA. In this way, CWA can learn well at school and can also start socializing with others.

5. Conclusion

The SPED teachers considered behavior management as a very crucial aspect that should be focused on when teaching learners with autism. In doing behavior management to the CWA, they experienced challenges such as lack of assistant teacher, need for instructional materials, and the insufficient background knowledge on the CWA. Moreover, they developed strategies to help manage the behavior of CWA namely: establishing rules and routines, ignoring, and observation. SPED teachers gain deeper understanding with more experience in managing behavior. The strategies allowed the SPED teachers to deal and educate the CWA in the SPED classrooms. The strategies also can be of help to parents as they deal with the CWA in their homes. It is then recommended that SPED teachers in the Philippines attend more training in managing well the CWA in the classroom. Furthermore, the need for instructional materials should be addressed. Lastly, this study focused only on the teachers' experiences in handling CWA, further studies can explore on the experiences of CWA as recipients of teachers' behavior management. Given the difficulty of managing behavior, SPED teachers require additional training and seminars.

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