UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

https://helda.helsinki.fi

Finnish Lower Secondary Special Needs Teachers' Reported Responsibilities and Supports for Students With Behavioral Problems

Gagnon, Joseph Calvin; Honkasilta, Juho; Tapio, Hanna-Sofia

2026-03-31
SAGE Publications Inc.
http://hdl.handle.net/10138/630905
Gagnon, J C, Honkasilta, J & Tapio, H-S 2026, 'Finnish Lower Secondary Special Needs Teachers' Reported Responsibilities and Supports for Students With Behavioral Problems', Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders. https://doi.org/10.1177/10634266261431273

Downloaded from Helda, University of Helsinki institutional repository. https://helda.helsinki.fi
This is an electronic reprint of the original article.
This reprint may differ from the original in pagination and typographic detail.
Please cite the original version.

Finnish Lower Secondary Special Needs Teachers' Reported Responsibilities and Supports for Students with Behavioral Problems

Joseph Calvin Gagnon, Ph.D.
Department of Special Education
Florida Atlantic University
josephgagnon@fau.edu
ORCID: 0000-0003-3266-5843

Juho Honkasilta, Ph.D.
Faculty of Educational Sciences
University of Helsinki
juho.honkasilta@helsinki.fi
ORCID: 0000-0001-6344-327X

Hanna-Sofia Tapio, M.A.
Faculty of Educational Sciences
University of Helsinki
hanna-sofia.tapio@hotmail.fi
ORCID: 0000-0003-2810-666X

Corresponding Author:
Joseph Calvin Gagnon, Ph.D.
Professor & Department Chair
Department of Special Education
Florida Atlantic University
Bldg 47 (Room 412), Boca Raton, FL 33431
561-599-1955
josephgagnon@fau.edu

Disclosure statement. The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

Ethical Approval. All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Informed Consent/Assent. Informed consent was obtained from all study participants.

Abstract

The current foundational study addressed the views of a stratified random sample (n = 217) of Finnish special needs teacher in grades grade 7-9, related to their views on supports for students with behavior problems. Seventy-eight (36%) special needs teachers responded to the survey, which focused on their views concerning two issues: (a) their responsibilities in terms of providing behavioral supports, cognitive-behavioral interventions (CBI), collaborating with others to address student behavior, and developing teacher-student relationships; (b) the specific strategies that they actually implement, which focused on the aforementioned approaches, as well as Check-In/Check-Out procedures, monitoring student behavior, and individualizing supports. The survey also queried participants on the frequency of use and if an intervention is not used, the reason(s). Finally, special needs teachers provided an open-ended response to what they viewed as the greatest challenge in managing student behavior. With the exception of two behavioral interventions, every other intervention had at least 90% of respondents that Agreed or Strongly Agreed that the approaches were their responsibility. Concerning the approaches that special needs teachers implement, 75% of participants reported using CBI Often or Sometimes. Use of other approaches was quite varied. Additional results and implications for research and practice are provided.

Keywords: Behavioral interventions and supports, special needs teacher views, lower secondary

Finnish Lower Secondary Special Needs Teachers' Reported Responsibilities and Supports for Students with Behavioral Problems

While Finnish schools' have a positive international reputation, student behavior is a national concern (Närhi et al., 2015; Sointu et al., 2022; The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2020). Problematic student behaviors include bullying, refusal to comply with teacher directions, inattention, and disrupting instruction (Alatupa et al., 2011; Whipp et al., 2021). Peer-to-peer violence is also quite common in Finnish schools (Ellonen et al., 2022). Moreover, Ellonen and colleagues noted that threats of and actual violence toward school personnel existed in half of their study schools and was particularly frequent in grades 1–9 (ages 7-15).

Despite the serious concerns with student behavior, what remains unknown is how special needs teachers attend to the challenge. Specifically, no information exists with regard to teachers' views of their responsibilities in terms of addressing student problem behavior. Moreover, it remains unclear which research-based or other more punitive and reactive interventions (e.g., detention) special needs teachers implement with students that require additional behavioral support. There is also a need to understand the frequency with which each intervention is implemented and if certain interventions are not implemented, the reasons.

In the sections that follow, there is a brief introduction of the Finnish special needs teacher training and school policy context. Next, a discussion is provided of the complications related to Finnish special needs teachers' responsibilities. Finally, information is presented related to behavioral interventions that are likely to be implemented because they are either research-based or are noted in national guidance documents.

Finnish Context

The difficulties that Finnish special needs teachers experience in attempting to address student problem behavior should be considered within the context of inadequate pre-service training and only broad national guidance. Specifically, the coursework that does exist provides limited training and knowledge of positive and proactive behavioral interventions and supports (Honkasilta et al. 2014; Gagnon et al., 2023; Moberg et al., 2020; Yada & Savolainen, 2019). With regard to national support, the Finnish Basic Education Act (2010) identifies what are considered appropriate responses for student disruption or "transgression," including a written warning or up to two hours

of detention.

Further, a student who is disruptive may also be required to leave the classroom, school, or school function. A student that is at risk for or exhibiting aggressive behavior or serious disruption may be removed for up to the remainder of the school day. For behaviors that are deemed serious or continue after the aforementioned consequences, a student may be suspended for up to three months. It is noteworthy that the national policies do not define "disruption," "transgression," or "aggressive behavior." Finally, a student that does not complete his/her/their homework may be required to spend up to one hour after school to complete the work.

The National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (Finnish National Board of Education, 2014) refers to the noted approaches to misbehavior in the Finnish Basic Education Act (2010) and also identifies the use of disciplinary educational discussion as a method to address student behavior problems. These discussions are designed for teachers to, "work together with the pupil to identify the act or neglect that warranted the measure, hear the pupil, investigate the reasons for and the consequences of their behaviour more extensively, and to consider means for rectifying the situation" (Finnish National Board of Education, 2014, Section 5.3). Given the limitations in pre-service special needs teacher training and that guidance in policy documents is limited to reactive and negative measures, as well as the single cognitive-behavioral intervention (CBI) described above, many Finnish special needs teachers report struggling with student behavior (Paananen et al., 2023) and being unprepared to address this issue (Moberg et al., 2020; Yada & Savolainen, 2019).

Special Needs Teachers' Responsibilities

While Finland is lauded for the trust placed in teachers and their subsequent autonomy in terms of pedagogical approaches to addressing student behavioral problems (Lavonen & Korhonen, 2017), this can be a challenge for special needs teachers in lower secondary schools (i.e., grades 7-9). These teachers provide assistance to students in need of behavioral support, while working within a system that actually de-emphasizes teacher collaboration. Frequently, there is a lack of common planning times and ill-defined roles and responsibilities for special needs and subject teachers (Paloniemi et al., 2023a). The problem is compounded by the fact that lower secondary students move between classrooms and are instructed by several different subject teachers (Kotilainen & Takala, 2024). While special needs teachers may have the desire and motivation to provide appropriate supports to students, including behavioral interventions and supports, they

describe their role as, “fragmented, unpredictable, and burdened by an unreasonable workload” (Kotilainen & Takala, 2025, p. 6).

Increasing the difficulties, little research exists that provides country-specific guidance on the role of lower secondary special needs teachers in terms of collaboration, consultation, and the expectation to provide direct behavioral interventions and supports to students (Sundqvist & Ström, 2015). In fact, the role of a special needs teacher in Finland depends largely on the teacher’s choices and the needs of the particular school (Paloniemi et al., 2023b). In one study, lower secondary (i.e., grades 7-9) special needs teachers delivered instruction 20-30 hours per week, primarily supporting students in small groups (Kotilainen & Takala, 2025). Kotilainen and Takala (2025) also reported that few special needs teachers co-teach with a general educator, and only 11% meet with students individually (Kotilainen & Takala, 2025). Moreover, in some instances, special needs teacher responsibilities are extended to providing guidance and counselling to students (Ström & Hannus-Gullmets, 2015). It is, perhaps, unsurprising that Finnish special needs teachers commonly identified that they wanted their job description to exclude providing services to students with behavioral problems (Sirkko et al., 2023).

Special needs teachers’ views of their responsibility in terms of supporting students with behavioral support needs is important, given that how they view their role can inform their actions. A brief review of research supports questioning special needs teachers on their perceived responsibilities in terms of behavioral supports, CBI, collaboration, and teacher-student relationships. Behavioral supports, in the school context, frequently rely on operant learning wherein student behavior is strengthened or weakened by positive or negative consequences (Gresham, 2015). Over time, the effectiveness of praise, rewards, time-out, and punitive consequences have proven effective, each to a varying degree, in modifying student behavior (Baer et al., 2017). CBIs combine the aforementioned behavioral approaches with strategies from cognitive psychology (Barnes et al., 2016). In terms of the cognitive component, the focus is on changing faulty or maladaptive thinking patterns as an approach to modify student behavior (Development Services Group, 2010). Common CBIs include teaching problem solving, understanding and expressing personal feelings and the feelings of others, and other social skills. In addition, CBIs includes self-monitoring techniques to increase student self-awareness of thoughts and actions, in order to promote more positive prosocial behavior (Banks et al., 2014). Overall,

CBIs improve student behavior and ability to solve social problems (Van Loan et al., 2019).

Two additional approaches can have positive effects on student behavior. First, collaboration with other professionals and parents are both seen as high leverage practices in the support of students with special needs (McLeskey et al., 2017). However, limited information indicates that co-teaching is still not well-established in Finland (Rönn-Liljenfeldt et al., 2024) and special needs teachers may feel ill-equipped to engage with parents (Orell & Pihlaja, 2020). Second, special needs teacher commitment to fostering positive student-teacher relationships are particularly critical for students that need behavioral interventions and supports, as these students are the least likely to have positive relationships with teachers (Pakarinen et al., 2018). However, it is unclear if Finnish special educators view these categories of interventions as under their purview.

Interventions to Address Student Behavior

There is also a need to understand the interventions that Finnish special needs teachers report implementing, the frequency of use, and if an intervention is not used, the reasons why. In addition to the aforementioned interventions and supports (i.e., behavioral supports, CBI, collaboration, teacher-student relationships), other research-based practices are important to support students in need of support for problem behavior, including Check-In/Check-Out (CICO) with students, monitoring student behavior, and providing individualized supports. CICO is an approach to address student problem behavior, typically consisting of a special needs teacher meeting with a student at the beginning of the school day to discuss and set behavioral goals, another meeting at the end of the day to discuss progress on the goals, special needs teachers providing feedback and praise/reinforcement for goals that are met, and regular communication with parents. Most of the research on CICO in Finland has focused on students in the primary grades, but it has proven effective in that context (Paananen et al., 2023). While monitoring of student behavior is an integral component to supporting students' behavioral needs, progress monitoring is noticeably absent from the Finnish framework of behavioral supports (Björn et al., 2018) and it is unclear if special needs teachers monitor student progress or support students to monitor their own progress. The final issue of focus relates to these teachers' use of individualized supports. Special needs teacher implementation of individualized supports, including assessing and prioritizing student problem behavior and identifying the function of a student's behavior are important to ensure student behavioral needs are met (Jeong & Copeland, 2020).

Finally, to fully understand Finnish special needs teacher views of student problem behavior, it is important to provide an opportunity for them to opine on the greatest challenge they face in managing students' behavior. In Finland, it is known that these teachers feel unprepared to address student behavior problems (Moberg et al., 2020; Yada & Savolainen, 2019). However, a greater depth of information is needed to provide context around the area that they report as the most problematic.

Purpose and Research Questions

Given the lack of information on Finnish grade 7-9 (ages 13-15) special needs teachers' views concerning their responsibilities to address the behavior of students in need of behavioral interventions and supports, the approaches they use and frequency, and their greatest concern relating to student behavior, the purpose of the current study is to address these issues via forced-choice and open-ended survey questions. The primary research questions were: (1) How do special needs teachers view their responsibilities in terms of providing behavioral interventions, CBI, collaborating with other professionals and parents, and promoting positive teacher-student relationships? (2) What approaches (i.e., behavioral interventions, CBI, collaborating with other professionals and parents, promoting positive teacher-student relationships, Check-In/Check-Out procedures, monitoring student behavior, providing individualized supports) do special needs teachers use and if they do not use an approach, what are the reason(s)? (3) What do special needs teachers believe is the greatest challenge they face in managing students' behavior?

Methods

Survey Development

Several procedures were employed to address the survey's validity and reliability. First, Finnish leaders in the field of special needs education and students with behavioral difficulties reviewed survey drafts. These reviewers commented on the survey layout, ease of directions, clarity of survey questions, and alignment of the research questions and survey questions. The survey was revised based on the feedback and primarily consisted of minor wording changes. Next, we addressed the content validity of survey items by calculating the content validity index (CVI) statistic for each survey question. To evaluate CVI, we had seven experts judge the extent to which the items were relevant using a four-point ordinal scale (1 = not relevant, 2 = somewhat relevant, 3 = quite relevant, 4 = highly relevant). For each survey question, the number rating of 3 or 4 was

divided by the number of content experts to calculate the proportion of agreement. A CVI value of .78 and higher is evidence of acceptable content validity (Polit et al., 2007).

Following a review to identify research-based and potentially common (e.g., detention) approaches to student behavior in Finland, CVI was organized by the two sections of the survey (i.e., 1. special needs teacher views of their responsibilities; and 2. special needs teacher reports of interventions implemented, the frequency of intervention, and reasons that an intervention was not implemented). Note that seven professionals provided ratings, except for six survey questions, where only six professionals provided ratings. CVI for the section on special needs teacher views of their responsibilities concerning student behavior was .93. Two survey questions were below the standard (i.e., teach students to understand consequences of her/his actions; teach students to monitor her/his own behavior), at .71. However, these were maintained, as they are relevant to CBI interventions. For the questions that focused on special needs teacher implementation of interventions, the overall CVI for these questions was .94. Two questions were below the standard: Give sanctions for undesirable behavior (.71); Give students after school detention (.75). However, these questions were maintained, due to the fact that reference is made to them in the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (Finnish National Board of Education, 2014).

Additionally, the final question on the survey was open-ended and focused on respondents' experience-based views on challenges in managing student behaviors (i.e., "In your experience, what is the greatest challenge in managing students' behavior?").

Survey Sampling and Data Collection

Statistics Finland provided the sampling frame. Because this was part of a larger project addressing special needs teacher and principal views of student behavior, and special needs teacher views of mathematics instruction (e.g., see Gagnon, in press). The total list of 2,107 Finnish comprehensive schools was stratified into three equal and randomly selected subsets. Statistics Finland could not verify the grades included at each school. As such, an online search was conducted and/or each school was called to verify they had grades 7-9. Additionally, schools were excluded if they were considered hospital schools, reform schools, or the school provided instruction in a language other than Finnish. Of the 702 schools in the current one-third of the universe, a total of 217 schools met the criteria for the study.

The principal from each school was directed to randomly select one special needs teacher of

students in any of grades 7-9. To ensure the rights of participants were protected, the authors obtained approval from the University of Helsinki Ethics Review Committee. Additionally, written consent was obtained from each participant. Data was collected in 2022 and consisted of five survey mailings and the opportunity for participants to complete the survey online. A total of 78 (36%) special needs teachers responded to the survey.

Data Analysis

Data analysis consisted of descriptive statistics for a couple of important reasons. First, in light of the lack of previous research at the Finnish lower secondary level focused on special needs teacher views related to student behavior, we concluded that there was insufficient theoretical evidence to conduct more complex analysis and wanted to avoid "fishing" for results. Second, the inclusion of questions that allow "all that apply" and the ordinal nature of questions that use the choices from "always" to "never" also inhibit more complex analysis. Third, post hoc evaluation of descriptive statistics revealed that there is an consistency of responses, despite the degree of Finnish special needs teacher autonomy and the lack of national guidance. As such, we did not surmise that additional analysis would result in more useful and nuanced conclusions.

Concerning the open-ended survey question, sixty-one respondents replied to the question. However, one answer was nonresponsive and was omitted from the analysis. Responses varied in length from one word (e.g., puberty; sub-category 2a) to several sentences. This qualitative data was analyzed in Finnish by the second and third author using inductive content analysis focused on generating categories (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008) and underlying themes found in them (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). A complete body of thought was chosen to be the unit of analysis, meaning that the unit of analysis could include one or several sentences and that one response may contain more than one sub-category.

At the first two phases of analysis, analyst triangulation was used to enhance the credibility and quality of analysis (Patton, 1999). The authors first independently coded responses and categorized them into sub- and general categories by using "what is the expressed problem?" as a guiding question (see, Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). After this, researchers discussed and adjusted their categories until consensus was reached. This phase of analysis yielded the following six general categories (number of coded responses in parentheses): (1) behavior management (n = 20); (2) student (i.e., characteristics or behavior) (n = 15); (3) collaboration (n = 15); (4) school structure (n

= 14); (5) pedagogical support provision (n = 7); and (6) external factors (n = 13).

The second author furthered the analysis in the third phase by forming three main categories, representing, (a) student-related, (b) structural and (c) external factors behind the most challenging problems presented in the data. The creation of categories focused on manifest content. Following Erlingsson and Brysiewicz (2017), at the final phase of analysis, latent content was analyzed to create themes that express the underlying, interpretative meaning of teachers' responses. This analysis phase utilized the guiding question, "Why is this expressed as the most challenging problem?" and yielded one underlying theme: The most challenging problems are out of special needs teachers' control.

Results

Respondents & Nonrespondents

Because individual teacher information was not collected on nonrespondents, analysis was conducted at the school level. A comparison was made based on school locale (i.e., urban, suburban, rural) and there were no statistically significant differences for respondents and nonrespondents for locale.

School and Participant Characteristics

In terms of the school and participant characteristics (see Table 1), schools where respondents worked most frequently included all of grades 1-9 (63.0%, n = 48). One participant's school (1.3%) participates in the ProKoulu program, which focuses on the schoolwide implementation of positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS). Respondents commonly provided additional support to students in need of behavioral support within inclusive settings (74.4%, n = 58). Teachers had an average of 76 students for whom they were responsible.

Concerning respondent characteristics (see Table 1), they were more commonly female (76.9%, n = 60). Teachers most commonly had earned a master's degree (92.3%, n = 72). In terms of university courses that focused on behavior, respondents most often reported taking 4 or more (33.8%, n = 24) courses. With regard to teaching experience, respondents have been employed as a teacher for an average of 17.6 years (SD = 8.97) and a median of 17.0 years. Also, respondents have worked in the field of special needs education an average of 12.9 (SD = 8.63) years and a median of 12.0 years.

Special Needs Teachers' Views of Responsibilities

Special needs teachers were asked about the extent to which they believed their responsibilities included assisting students in four ways: Behavioral interventions, CBI, collaborating with other professionals and parents, and promoting a positive teacher-student relationship (see Table 2). In terms of providing behavioral interventions and supports, salient results included the fact that these teachers most often Strongly Agreed with giving positive feedback directed at expected student behavior (78.2%, *n* = 61) and encouraging students to behave as expected (71.8%, *n* = 56). Special needs teachers had the most mixed opinions on their responsibilities in terms of the use of concrete rewards for students, with a total of 43.6% (*n* = 34) Disagreeing or Neither Agreeing nor Disagreeing. Special needs teacher views of their responsibilities to implement CBI were highly consistent. At least 90% of the respondents noted that they Agreed or Strongly Agreed with each of the CBI approaches listed in Table 2. With regard to collaborating with others, special needs teachers overwhelmingly Agreed or Strongly Agreed with their role to meet with guardians to discuss student behavior (97.4%, *n* = 76 combined) and to meet with professionals from other areas to discuss student behavior, if necessary (100%, *n* = 78). Similarly, 100% of special needs teachers either Agreed or Strongly Agreed with their responsibility to develop a positive relationship with students (*n* = 78) and to provide students with a trusted adult (*n* = 78).

Approaches to Student Behavior

To understand the approaches actually implemented by respondents, we queried them on the frequency of use and if an approach was never used, the reasons why it was not used. We collected data on six topics (i.e., check-in with students, monitor student behavior, behavioral interventions, CBI, collaborate with others, and individualized supports). The frequency choices were Always (Daily), Often (2-4 times/week), Sometimes (1-4 times/month), Never, and I Don't Know. Also, some special needs teachers did not respond to every question and percentages are based on the total number of respondents that answered each specific question. Results related to the first three interventions includes the fact that special needs teachers Sometimes or Never checked-in with students at the beginning of the day to remind them about setting behavioral goals (72.8%, *n* = 56 combined) and to encourage him/her/them to reach behavioral goals (70.2%, *n* = 54 combined) (see Table 3). Similarly, special needs teachers Sometimes or Never met with students at the end of the

day to review the progress in behavioral goals (84.0%, *n* = 63 combined) and to give encouraging feedback about reaching behavioral goals (74.7%, *n* = 59 combined). The most common reasons special needs teachers Never implemented each approach was that it is not their responsibility, followed by the fact that it doesn't match the school's approach.

Special needs teachers varied on their implementation of monitoring student behavior and supporting students to monitor their own behavior. In terms of maintaining a record of students' undesirable behaviors and a record of students' exhibiting expected behaviors, most teachers did so Sometimes (42.9%, *n* = 33; 37.7%, *n* = 29, respectively). However, related to assisting student to monitor their own undesirable and expected behaviors, teachers most commonly Never did so (74.0%, *n* = 57; 70.1%, *n* = 54, respectively). For those that Never implement the interventions, the most common reasons for each was that it does not match their approach and that it is not their responsibility. Additionally, teachers rarely observed students during the school day and recorded behavioral information, with most reporting that they Never do so (48.7%, *n* = 37). Most commonly, teachers noted that this action did not align with their approach.

With regard to behavioral interventions, special needs teachers frequently provided positive feedback to encourage students to behave as expected on a Daily (47.4%, *n* = 36) or Often basis (40.8%, *n* = 31). In contrast, special needs teachers Often (36.0%, *n* = 27) or Sometimes (33.3%, *n* = 25) reinforced student behavior with tokens. Additionally, special needs teachers reinforced student behavior with individualized rewards Sometimes (53.2%, *n* = 41). In terms of the reasons for never reinforcing students with tokens or individualized rewards, the most common response was that it did not match the special needs teacher's approach (*n* = 8, *n* = 9, respectively). Special needs teachers Sometimes or Never utilized time-out (49.3%, *n* = 37; 48.0%, *n* = 36, respectively), primarily because it does not match the their approach. In terms of negative consequences, special needs teachers Sometimes removed student privileges for undesirable behavior (63.6%, *n* = 49), when they did not removed privileges, it was most commonly because it did not match their approach (*n* =11). Special needs teachers reported providing sanctions for undesirable behavior Often (55.8%, *n* = 43). Respondents also administered detention to students Sometimes or Never (49.3%, *n* = 37; 38.7%, *n* = 29, respectively), with most never providing detention because it does not match their approach (*n* = 18). Lastly, most special needs teachers reported that they Never suspend students from school (72.0%, *n* = 54). However, 21.3% (*n* = 16) reported that they did not

know if they used suspension. The reasons for not using suspension are that it is not the teacher's responsibility (n = 27) or that it does not match their approach (n = 13).

Concerning the implementation of CBI and collaborating with others, special needs teacher reports were quite consistent. For six of the CBI interventions (i.e., help students set personal goals, teach students to identify their own feelings, teach student how her/his/their feelings influence behavior, meet with student individually to discuss her/his/their behavior, teach students to manage their feelings, teach students to monitor their own behavior, teach student how to solve problems), at least 75% of participants reported using them Often or Sometimes. Two exceptions were teaching students to use social skills and helping students to set personal goals, where respondents most commonly implemented the intervention Often (44.7%, n = 34; 50.6%, n = 39, respectively).

There were other noteworthy responses concerning collaborating with others. Most respondents reported they Often meet with professionals from other areas to discuss student behavior and report when a student behaves as expected to a student's guardians (46.8%, n = 36; 48.1%, n = 37, respectively). Additionally, respondents Sometimes contact guardians when a student behaves inappropriately (56.6%, n = 43).

The final category of approaches focused on providing individualized supports. For individualized supports, special needs teachers most typically responded Always for ensuring students are provided individual supports (47.4%, n = 36) and that the special needs teacher tries to understand the reasons for a student's behavior (40.3%, n = 31). In contrast, for assessing which student problem behavior to prioritize, respondents most commonly reported they did so Often (37.7%, n = 29).

Special Needs Teachers' Challenges

In special needs teachers' responses to the open-ended question regarding what they viewed as the most challenging in managing student behaviors, expressed problems revealed to some extent, the mismatch between official school factors and issues outside of school (see Table 4). Furthermore, special needs teachers' responses indicate the complexity of viewed challenges, ranging from student characteristics and classroom dynamics among students, to issues related to collaboration between different stakeholders and how schooling in lower secondary is structured in Finland.

The overarching theme prevalent in special needs teachers' responses was that the most

challenging issues were out of their control. One way to illustrate this is to look at the four most frequently described challenges in our data that consider problems as stemming from student characteristics (sub-category 2a, *n* = 10), home-school collaboration (sub-category 3a, *n* = 9), home characteristics (sub-category 6a, *n* = 9), and schooling structure in grades 7-9 (sub-category 4a, *n* = 7). These four sub-categories attribute the pressing challenges to factors that special needs teachers alone cannot directly influence, and the first three of them draw particular attention to home as a context affecting education.

This theme provides further insight into special needs teachers' survey question responses regarding what they view as their role and responsibilities by highlighting the values respondents embed in their role as a special needs teacher and circumstances that constrain and perhaps, undervalue their role. This is demonstrated in the following data excerpt, in which a respondent concludes the listing of experienced problems with an emotional account: "However, you must trust that a long and exacting job provides fruit, otherwise you can't manage."

Main Category 1: Student-Related Factors

The main category 1 contains two sub-categories: Behavior management (category 1, *n* = 20) and student (sub-category 2, *n* = 15). Unsurprisingly, behavior management arose as the most frequently mentioned issue. Reported challenges concerning behavior management focused on students' behaviors and special needs teachers' ways of dealing with them. Student behaviors covered classroom management (*n* = 6), wherein group dynamics were seen as causing disturbance (e.g., "fights between students: separating them and investigating the causes"), unanticipated situations (*n* = 4) attributed to factors outside schooling (e.g., skipped breakfast, dating), as well as student aggression or violence (*n* = 4). Aggression and violence were merely mentioned without further elaborations, as demonstrated in the following data excerpt: "Also, so-called biting-the-hand-that-feeds-you phenomenon has emerged, including bad behavior and even violence." In this excerpt, the expression about biting the feeding hand associated with bad behavior and violence, views the special needs teacher/school as a benefactor met with ingratitude, associating the problem with issues students bring with them into schools, rather than viewing special needs teachers/school as potentially triggering these behaviors. This is the prevailing association concerning the behavior management category.

Behavior management is viewed as reactive rather than proactive by nature. In this regard,

special needs teachers expressed challenges with creating a mutual connection with individual students whose schooling is at risk (n = 3), and with their own behavioral and emotional self-control (n = 3) when dealing with challenging or disturbing behaviors. This latter sub-category regarding special needs teacher self-control entails the few responses in which agency is implied. This strengthens our analysis that behavior management is viewed as being out of special needs teachers' control, since the only controllable variant in the picture is the special needs teacher's ability to control oneself.

Student-related factors analyzed in our data are closely related to behavior management. However, in this category either student characteristics (sub-category 2a, n = 10) or behavior (sub-category 2b, n = 5) are explicitly mentioned as being reasons for experienced challenges. Motivation was a common characteristic for this category, as illustrated in data excerpts below (sub-categories marked within square brackets):

> "Children and young people who behave the most challenging don't regard schooling meaningful nor important." [2a]
>
> "As for teaching, it is challenging if student is not willing to receive teaching and refuses to study." [2b]

In addition to being unmotivated, as described above, student characteristics in our data include being out of reach, lacking empathy or executive functioning skills, and having issues with behavior, mental health, or everyday life management. The data does not enable more in-depth analysis on reported student-related characteristics and educational contexts in which they take place. However, it is striking that while these issues are partly pedagogical in nature, challenges regarding providing pedagogical support (e.g., instructional, motivational, or emotional), either at individual or classroom level, were not commonly emphasized in special needs teachers' responses. Next, we illustrate what constitutes this complex picture and the interconnectedness of analyzed categories.

Main Category 2: Structural Factors

This main category includes three sub-categories: Collaboration (sub-category 3, n = 15), school structure (sub-category 4, n = 14), and pedagogical support provision (sub-category 5, n = 7). The data excerpts below illustrate the width and overlap of these categories.

> "[The greatest challenge in managing students' behavior is] the turnover of [student]

> groups and teachers in lower secondary. [4a] Different teachers adopt different approaches to challenging behavior: some turn a blind eye, some are stricter. Punishments/rewards are not identical." [5a]
>
> "As a part-time special education teacher, I don't see a student daily. [4c] Getting subject teachers to come together in a common front to abide by collectively decided matters and to receive [in-service] training [is challenging]." [3c]

Schooling structured around subject-teaching in lower secondary schools was the 4th frequently described challenge in our data (sub-category 4a, $n = 7$). This is one of the central issues brought up in the data, as it is connected to challenges related to collaboration with colleagues (sub-category 3c, $n = 3$), special needs teacher's role and tasks (sub-category 4c, $n = 3$) and providing individualized pedagogical support (sub-category 5a, $n = 5$) within the system. Providing (consultation regarding) individualized supports in collaboration falls on special needs teachers (Sirkko et al., 2023; Takala et al., 2023). If faced with resistance to create a common ground for structuring support (proactively/reactively) in collaboration with colleagues paired with no prerequisites to spend enough time with individual students to adequately support them, it is understandable that the data is characterized by the exclusion of behavioral support from the core of the viewed complexity.

Collaboration with other professionals was also described as challenging (sub-category 3b; $n = 3$). This, and the related complexity of issues special needs teachers struggle with, is illustrated in the next data excerpt.

> "Some students are already so difficult to reach that it is difficult to intervene through means of compulsory schooling. [2a] This job requires intense collaboration among adults, but in my experience, I don't always receive help from e.g., social services. [3b]"

As brought forth in the first sentence describing student characteristics (sub-category 2a), underlying causes for some student behaviors can be complex and cannot be supported by pedagogical means of support alone. The use of the noun adult emphasizes the shared educational responsibility of different stakeholders (caregivers, special needs teachers, other professionals) over the well-being of young students in the context of lower secondary education. Explicit reference to social services as an example of experienced challenges in interprofessional collaboration may imply broader structural issues in local administrative level resourcing such services beyond the

school's control. Also, reference to social services implies challenges with underlying causes that involve homes as either collaborators in or targets of a means of support.

Although we analyzed home-school collaboration and home characteristics in separate main categories based on the content of responses, special needs teachers' responses create a link between challenges related to home-school collaboration and home characteristics. Thus, we will discuss collaboration between homes and school in the next result section as part of external factors.

Main Category 3: External Factors

This main category consists of one category, external factors (n = 13), divided into two sub-categories: home characteristics (sub-category 6a, n = 9) and "other" (sub-category 6b, n = 4). Sub-category "other" consists of responses that place the problem in external factors, but either provide noninformative content (e.g., "external factors behind behaviors") or ambiguous content, such as "not being able to influence the underlying causes of problems (home situation etc.)." In the latter example of ambiguous content, not being able to influence is the expressed problem (i.e., answer to the question), but it remains ambiguous what other underlying causes are referred to besides home. It is clear, however, that these underlying problems reside in external factors outside schooling and special needs teachers' control.

The implication characteristic of our data is that problems at school derive from home, either by creating their child's behaviors and traits or fostering them. Associated family characteristics include tiredness and broadly put, parents having lost their authority as parents (e.g., helicopter parenting, parents being friends rather than parents). Thus, special needs teachers' responses entailed a mix of empathic and judgmental views, of which the latter is demonstrated in the following data excerpt:

> "Children and young people who behave the most challenging don't regard schooling meaningful nor important. [2a] And when something is neither viewed as important by parents, [6a] instructions [from the school] are not welcomed nor held important. Communicating is challenging and agreements are not abided. [5a] Often this is an inter-generational spiral difficult to break. [6a]

In the excerpt, the participant starts with linking student (sub-category 2a) and associated home characteristics (sub-category 6a), followed by describing challenges in home-school collaboration (sub-category 5a; n = 9). As for home-school collaboration then, expressed challenges

include either parents' undervaluing education and teacher institutions in general, as in the above extract, or opposing proposed support provision.

Discussion

It is reported that teachers in Finland have serious difficulties with student behavior (Moberg et al., 2020; Yada & Savolainen, 2019). Yet, to date, no study has addressed Finnish lower secondary (i.e., grade 7-9) special needs teachers' views concerning their responsibilities to address student behavior problems, the approaches they use and frequency of use, reasons certain approaches are not used, and their greatest concern relating to student behavior. The current study provides foundational information that can inform future research and practice.

Implications for Research

In terms of special needs teachers' views of their responsibilities regarding student behavior, perhaps the most striking finding is the consistency with which certain views are held. With the exception of two behavioral interventions, every other intervention had at least 90% of respondents that Agreed or Strongly Agreed that the intervention was their responsibility. Only for the use of concrete rewards for students and providing students with agreed upon sanctions for undesirable behavior (e.g., detention, removing privileges) was there any substantial variation. It is interesting that while Finnish special needs teachers have a great deal of autonomy (Lavonen & Korhonen, 2017) and relatively little national guidance, they share common views. The survey findings do not indicate the reasons for this conformity and future research is needed to query teachers on the origination of their views and the potential support or lack of backing they are provided at the municipality and school levels, which may contribute to their views. Further, an analysis of teacher preparation programs could provide insight. While university syllabi in Finland rarely provide in-depth detail on lecture topics, group activities, or additional readings (Gagnon et al., 2023), interviews with university faculty, pre-service teachers, and special needs teachers would provide additional insights.

The other interesting finding related to special needs teachers' perceived responsibilities is that there existed a small contingent of special needs teachers that neither agreed nor disagreed with their responsibility to utilize CBI. Again, the overwhelming number of teachers agreed or strongly agreed with use of these strategies,. However, 7-9% of respondents did not wholly agree with their responsibility to teach students to analyze their own behavior, how to identify their feelings, or how

to express their feelings. Emotional awareness and emotion regulation are strongly related to student behavior problems (Sourander et al., 2024). While researchers (Sointu et al., 2022) asserted that Finnish students practice such skills in small groups and in classroom situations, additional research is necessary to identify who is responsible for these activities (e.g., special needs teacher, subject teacher, both) and the extent to which special needs teachers have the autonomy to avoid providing such training to students, if it does not match their approach to teaching or they deem it as outside of their responsibility.

The practices that special needs teachers use to address student behavior, frequency of use, and reasons if an approach is not used, are slightly more variable. Two points of data from the current survey provide important context for consideration. First, special needs teachers reported an average of 76 student on their caseload. It is possible that providing behavioral interventions and supports for this many students may affect the frequency with which teachers can feasibly provide support to students with behavior problems, despite their aforementioned acknowledgement that approaches were under their purview. However, it is compelling that when teacher do not implement certain behavioral interventions and supports, the most common reasons were that they did not align with the special needs teachers' philosophy or that it was not their responsibility, rather than a lack of staff. These somewhat contradictory findings require additional research to better understand the extent to which teachers are constrained by their caseload and how they adapt, as well as how behavioral interventions and supports are provided when the special needs teachers abdicate responsibility for implementation.

With regard to implementation of specific interventions and supports, it is noteworthy that over 70% of special needs teachers implemented Check-In/Check-Out procedures either sometimes (1-4 time/month) or never. Check-In/Check-Out is a highly effective approach that is designed to be implemented on a daily basis (Paananen et al., 2023). As such, teacher implementation at such a frequency is likely to have minimal effects on students. While previous research is severely limited, the result should be considered within the context that only 11% of special needs teachers reported meeting individually with students (Kotilainen & Takala, 2025). Research is needed to identify if the reasons for this decision include difficulty with the time needed for implementation and/or the extent to which special needs teachers believe that the currently reported frequency is sufficient to effectively assist students.

Similarly, in terms of monitoring student behavior, special needs teachers most frequently reported doing so either sometimes or never with the exception of maintaining a record of a student exhibiting expected behaviors, which was more varied. For special needs teachers that never implemented monitoring procedures, the most common reasons were that it did not match their approach, followed by an assertion that it was not their responsibility. The fact that special needs teachers infrequently monitor student behavior and some view monitoring as being outside of their purview might be related to pre-service training and/or their infrequent meeting with students on an individual basis. However, it could be conjectured that the inconsistency of monitoring student behavior by the special needs teacher may also be linked to the fact that each municipality has their own standard of behavioral assessment and special needs teachers may feel disconnected from the process (Svens-Liavåg et al., 2024). Future research is needed to clarify these potential connections and compare special needs teacher use of behavioral monitoring from different university programs, across municipalities and schools, and by the format of providing services (e.g., small group, individual assistance) and frequency of interactions with students.

Based on the replies to the open-ended question, these responses could be an indication of reported challenges related to the structuring of lower secondary education and collaboration. Special needs teachers maintain a central role in providing support to students with behavioral needs (Takala et al., 2023), yet the existing structures may not support their work in the most optimal way (Sirkko et al., 2023). Thus, it may be that special needs teachers do not see value in providing these research-supported approaches, they lack related knowhow, or they adjust their approach according to existing structures by focusing on practices that are more feasible to implement in their role within their school. Future interview and observational research focused on both class teachers and special needs teachers could provide valuable insight into why special needs teachers relinquish their role with regard to these effective approaches, what they need to ensure that they can provide necessary supports, and what types of related actions are necessary from subject teachers.

Variability also existed within special needs teachers' use of behavioral interventions. While punitive approaches are noted in the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014 (Finnish National Board of Education, 2014, Section 5.3) and limited research has indicated that teachers commonly use such approaches (Saloviita, 2018), the current study revealed that special needs

teachers infrequently (i.e., 1-4 times per month) or never remove privileges or give sanctions, give students time-out, detention, or suspension. Special needs teachers also tended not to use points/tokens, or individualized rewards and instead used positive feedback. While positive feedback is certainly important and appropriate (Perle, 2016), there are some concerns that students in need of behavioral supports would need the lesser used positive interventions to support them as they progress toward internalization of appropriate behaviors. Future intervention research should evaluate the differential effects of a reliance on positive feedback vs. the use of points/tokens or individualized rewards with Finnish students that do not benefit from schoolwide and/or classwide interventions.

Results also indicated relative consistency of special needs teacher responses to implementation of CBI. With the exception of teaching social skills, which was more frequently provided always or often, over 70% of respondents implemented each form of CBI often or sometimes. However, research is needed on the specific forms that CBI takes and to identify the details of the interventions, as well as the extent to which interventions are provided with the necessary frequency and with fidelity of implementation.

Related to the provision of individualized supports and identifying the function of student behavior, special needs teachers most often responded always or often. However, the assertion that individualized interventions are common would seem to contrast with the aforementioned types of interventions. There is a significant need to explore the ways in which Finnish lower secondary special needs teachers actually implement individualized interventions to address student behavior. Moreover, there is a dearth of empirical research to evaluate the effects of these interventions within the Finnish lower secondary school context.

Finally, special needs teachers reported that their greatest challenges had to do with home and student characteristics (rather than student behaviors), thus, attributing the most pressing challenges to factors outside schooling and special needs teachers' direct influence. General information from the quantitative survey questions indicated that special needs teachers communicate with other professionals and contact parents often or sometimes. However, future research should explore the form and effects of the current collaborative efforts between lower secondary special needs teachers, subject teachers, parents, counselors, psychologists, and professionals from child welfare.

Implications for Practice

Although the response rate of 36% in the current study is below the desired 50% (Weisberg, Krosnick, & Bowen, 1989), results of the current study provide important implications for practice. Overall, the consistency of Finnish grade 7-9 special needs teacher views concerning their responsibilities and the interventions they use to address student behavior portends well for students who do not respond to schoolwide and classwide approaches and are in need additional behavioral interventions and supports. However, there are areas where these teachers reported infrequently implementing research-based practices. For example, special needs teachers rarely relied on Check-In/Check-Out procedures, monitoring of student behavior, and helping students to monitor their own behavior. This concern over delineation of special needs teachers' roles has emerged as a significant issue for a decade (Paloniemi et al., 2023a; Sundqvist et al., 2014). Additional pre-service and in-service training focused on the importance of data-based decision making are warranted, particularly because these teachers often identify that they understand the interventions, but that there is misalignment with their individual approaches.

Two other issues also warrant a recommendation for additional special needs teacher training. First, related to the utilization of secondary (i.e., points, tokens) and individualized rewards, it is concerning that respondents rarely implemented these approaches, given the unique and at times, serious behavioral needs of students (Ellonen et al., 2022). Assisting these students may require the use of external reinforcers and those that are individually chosen. These can ultimately be faded, as students internalize target behaviors. Second, special needs teachers typically limited their use of teaching specific CBI skills to students to 1-2 times per week or month. There are concerns that such infrequent emphasis on CBI would be insufficient for significant and lasting changes in student behavior (Van Loan, 2019).

While special needs teacher training is certainly important to ensure teacher use of evidence-based practices to address student behavior (Sointu et al., 2022), simply providing in-service training alone may be insufficient. An important point must be made regarding the reasons that these teachers do not implement certain approaches to address student behavior. While previous research has highlighted teacher feelings of being unprepared to address student behavior (e.g., Saloviita, 2020), the need for more training was almost never identified as a reason that a specific intervention was not used. Rather, special needs teachers primarily reported that certain

interventions did not match their approach or that it was not their responsibility. In terms of the numerous evidence-based and promising practices included in the survey, there appears to be a disconnect in some cases between the research evidence and individual special needs teacher approaches. As such, training must be coupled with discussions to understand why special needs teachers' views are inconsistent with evidence-based practices and how the use of such practices can be feasibly implemented. Moreover, an evaluation of school policies is necessary to better define special needs teachers' roles and ensure that there are structures in place to allow teachers the time to support students in the most effective and efficient ways possible.

Limitations

The most significant limitations to the current foundational study relate to the relatively low sample size and response rate. Moreover, a greater sample size would be necessary to disaggregate data and compare responding special needs teachers that provide additional behavioral supports within an inclusive or part-time pull-out program (74.4%, $n = 58$), versus those providing services in a full-time separate class (25.6%, $n = 20$). While these issues should certainly temper conclusions, the data provides important information that can inform future research and practice.

Another limitation is the new Finnish policy change that emphasizes group focused approaches (City of Helsinki, 2025). On the City of Helsinki website (2025), the three new types of support available to students are delineated as, "general remedial teaching provided by the teacher, remedial teaching in the teaching language provided by the teacher, and teaching provided by a special needs teacher alongside other teaching." While the policy change provides emphasis on collaboration between subject and special needs teachers, the necessity for special needs teachers to recognize their responsibilities with regard to students with behavioral needs and the frequent implementation of research-based behavioral interventions and supports, remain relevant.

Two additional limitations are noteworthy. First, in the initial survey questions, the participants were asked to respond if they taught students in grades 7-9 and to base responses on that group of students. However, there was no question that asked if participants also taught other grade levels. If special needs teachers also have responsibilities for students in grades 1-6, this could affect the frequency with which they use certain approaches. Second, the survey did not question participants on the total amount of time that they provided support to students in need of behavioral interventions and supports. This data would also have provided important context in

which to analyze the frequency with which approaches were implemented.

Conclusions

Given the difficulties that Finnish special needs teachers experience with student behavior, it is critical that we consider how they view their responsibilities, the interventions they use, and why they do not use certain interventions. The current study provides a complex picture where special needs teachers commonly view the need to provide supports to students in a variety of ways, but that they often only do so infrequently. Future research is sorely needed that furthers this line of inquiry, in order to ensure Finnish lower secondary special needs teachers understand their role and that the necessary school structures are in place for them to implement evidence-based behavioral practices to students in need.

References

Alatupa, S., Pulkki-Råback, L., Hintsanen, M., Mullola, S., Lipsanen, J., & Keltikangas-Järvinen, L.

(2011). Childhood disruptive behavior and school performance across comprehensive school: A prospective cohort study. Psychology, 2, 542-551. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/psych.2011.26084

Baer, G. G., Slaughter, J. C., Mantz, L. S., & Farley-Ripple, E. (2017). Rewards, praise, and punitive

consequences: Relations with intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 65*, 10-20. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2017.03.001

Banks, T., Squires, G., & Anhalt, K. (2014). Interdisciplinary collaboration: Cognitive behavioral interventions in special educations and school psychology. *Creative Education, 5*, 758-768. http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/ce.2014.510089

Barnes, T. N., Smith, S. W., Daunic, A. P., & Leite, W. L. (2016). Do student characteristics influence

the effectiveness of the Tools for Getting Along curriculum? An examination using cognitive-behavioral intervention. *Education and Treatment of Children, 39*, 569-591. https://www.jstor.org/stable/44684125

Basic Education Act [Finland] 628/1998. (2010). https://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/1998/en19980628.pdf

Björn, P. M., Aro, M., Koponen, T., Fuchs, L. S., & Fuchs, D. (2018). Response-to-intervention in Finland and the United States: Mathematics learning support as an example. *Frontiers in Psychology, 9*(9), Article 800), 1-10. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00800

Björn, P. M., Aro, M., Koponen, T., Fuchs, L. S., & Fuchs, D. (2016). The many faces of special

education within RTI frameworks in the United States and Finland. *Learning Disability Quarterly, 39*(1), 58–66. https://doi.org/10.1177/0731948715594787

City of Helsinki. (2025). *Changes in support for learning 2025*. Author. https://www.hel.fi/en/childhood-and-education/changes-in-support-for-learning-2025#key-changes-in-pre-primary-and-basic-education

Development Services Group, Inc. (2010). *Cognitive behavioral treatment*. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. https://www.ojjdp.gov/mpg/litreviews/Cognitive_Behavioral_Treatment.pdf

Ellonen, N., Pasanen, M., Wiss, K., Mielityinen, L., Lähteenmäaki, E., & Joronen, K. (2022). Health promotion actions and school violence-A cluster analysis from Finnish comprehensive schools. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 19*, Article 12698. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph191912698

Elo, S. & Kyngäs, H. (2008). The qualitative content analysis process. J*ournal of Advanced Nursing*, *62*, 107–115. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2007.04569.x

Erlingsson, C. & Brysiewicz, P. (2017). A hands-on guide to doing content analysis. *African Journal of Emergency Medicine*, *7*, 93-99. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.afjem.2017.08.001

Finnish National Board of Education. (2014). *National core curriculum for basic education 2014*. Author.

Gagnon, J. C. (in press). Finnish lower secondary special needs teachers' self-efficacy and approaches to mathematics instruction for students with intensive and special needs. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*.

Gagnon, J. C., Honkasilta, J., & Jahnukainen, M. (2023). *Teacher education in Finland: Progress on*

preparing teachers for inclusion of students with learning and behavioral difficulties. In R. de Oliveira Brito, R. & A. Anselmo Guilherme (Eds.), *Formação de Professores ao redor do mundo: Desafios e oportunidades (Teacher education around the world: Challenges and opportunities*) (pp. 197-222). United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. ISBN: 978-65-87522-13-5.

Gresham, F. M. (2015). Philosophical foundations of behavioral interventions. In W. G. Scarlett (Ed.),

The SAGE encyclopedia of classroom management (pp. 97-101). SAGE.

Honkasilta, J., Sandberg, E., Närhi, V., & Jauhnukainen, M. (2014). ADHD in the context of Finnish basic education. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties 19*, 311–323. https://doi.org/10.1080/13632752.2014.883789

Jeong, Y., & Copeland, S. R. (2020). Comparing functional behavior assessment-based interventions

and non-functional behavior assessment-based interventions: A systematic review of outcomes and methodological quality of studies. *Journal of Behavioral Education, 29*, 1-41. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10864-019-09355-4

Kotilainen, N., & Takala, M. (2024). 'Most of the time, I am the three-tiered support system' – Subject

teachers' views on tiered support and part-time special education in lower secondary schools. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, Online*, 1-17. https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2024.2421110

Kotilainen, N., & Takala, M. (2025). "So much invisible work"– the role of special education teachers

in Finnish lower secondary schools, *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, Online, 1-15. https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2024.2317733

Lavonen, J., & Korhonen, T. (2017). Towards twenty-first century education: Success factors, challenges, and the renewal of Finnish education. In S. Choo, D. Sawch, A. Willanueva, and R. Vinz (Eds.), *Educating for the 21st century: Perspectives, policies and practices from around the world* (pp. 243-264). Springer.

McLeskey, J., Barringer, M-D., Billingsley, B., Brownell, M., Jackson, D., Kennedy, M., Lewis, T., Maheady, L., Rodriguez, J., Scheeler, M. C., Winn, J., & Ziegler, D. (2017). *High-leverage practices in special education*. Council for Exceptional Children & CEEDAR Center. https://ceedar.education.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/CEC-HLP-Web.pdf

Moberg, S., Muta, E., Korenaga, K., Kuorelahti, M. & Savolainen, H. (2020). Struggling for inclusive education in Japan and Finland: teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 35*, 100-114. https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2019.1615800

Närhi, V., Kiiski, T., Peitso S., & Savolainen, H. (2015). Reducing disruptive behaviours and improving learning climates with class-wide positive behaviour support in middle school. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 30*, 274-285. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2014.986913

Orell, M., & Pihlaja, P. (2020). Cooperation between home and school in the Finnish Core Curriculum 2014. *Nordic Studies in Education, 40*, 107-128. https://doi.org/10.23865/nse.v40.2224

Paananen, M., Karhu, A., & Savolainen, H. (2023). Individual behavior support in positive behavior support schools in Finland. *International Journal of Developmental Disabilities, 69*, 45-52. https://doi.org/10.1080/20473869.2022.2116236

Pakarinen, E., Silinskas, G., Hamre, B. K., Metsäpelto, R-L., Lerkkanen, M-K., Poikkeus, A-M., & Nurmi, J-K. (2018). Cross-lagged associations between problem behaviors and teacher-student relationships in early adolescence. *The Journal of Early Adolescence, 8*, 1100-1141. https://doi.org/10.1177/0272431617714328

Paloniemi, A., Björn, P. M., & Kärnä, E. (2023a). Special education teachers' views on their agency in teacher collaboration. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 3*, 349-362. https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2022.2089509

Paloniemi, A., Pulkkinen, J., Kärnä, E., & Björn, P. M. (2023b). The work of special education

teachers in the tiered support system: The Finnish case. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research, 67*, Article 35050. https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2021.1983649

Patton, M. Q. (1999). Enhancing the quality and credibility of qualitative analysis. *Health Services Research*, *34*, 1189-1208.

Perle, J. G. (2016). Teacher-provided positive attending to improve student behavior. *TEACHING Exceptional Children, 48*, 250-257. https://doi.org/10.1177/0040059916643707

Polit, D. F., Beck, C. T., & Owen, S. V. (2007). Is the CVI an acceptable indicator of content validity?

Appraisal and recommendations. *Research in Nursing & Health, 30*, 459–467. https://doi.org/10.1002/nur.20199

Rönn-Liljenfeldt, M., Sundqvist, C., & Ström, K. (2024). Between vision and reality: Finnish school

leaders' experiences of their own and teachers' roles in the development of co-teaching. *Scandincavian Journal of Educational Research, 68*, 647-660. https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2023.2175247

Sainio, P. J., Eklund, K. M., Pakarinen, E. K., & Kiuru, N. H. (2023). The role of teacher closeness in

emotions and achievement for adolescents with and without learning difficulties. *Learning Disability Quarterly, 46*, 151-165. https://doi.org/10.1177/07319487221086006

Saloviita, T. (2018). How common are inclusive educational practices among Finnish teachers? International *Journal of Inclusive Education, 22*, 560-575. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2017.1390001

Saloviita, T. (2020). Teacher attitudes towards the inclusion of students with support needs. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 20, 64–73. https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-3802.12466

Sirkko, R., Kotilainen, N. & Takala, M. (2023). Erityisopettajan työ osa-aikaisessa erityisopetuksessa.

Kasvatus & Aika, 17(3), 4-25. https://doi.org/10.33350/ka.128889

Sointu, E., Waltzer, K., Pursiainen, J., Äikäa, A., & Lappalainen, K. (2022). International perspectives:

Behaviour management in Finland. In E. Clarke (Ed.), *Contemporary approaches to behaviour and mental health in the classroom: Weaving together theory, practice, policy and educational discourse*. Routledge. ISBN: 978-0-367-47426-3

Sourander, A., Ishikawa, S., Ståhlberg, T., Kishida, K., Mori, Y., Matsubara, K., Zhang, X., Hida, N.,

Korpilahti-Leino, T., Ristkari, T., Torii, S., Gilbert, S., Hinkka-Yli-Salomäka, S., Savolainen, H., & Närhi, V. (2024). Cultural adaptation, content, and protocol of a feasibility study of school-based "Let's learn about emotions" intervention for Finnish primary school children. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, Article 1334282. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyt.2023.1334282

Statistics Finland. (2023, August 17). *Intensified or special support was received by 24 per cent of comprehensive school pupils in 2022*. Author. https://stat.fi/en/publication/cl8lmq0ndqquf0dutte806lj3

Ström, K., & Hannus-Gullmets, B. (2015). From special (class) teacher to special educator: The Finnish case. In D. Lansing Cameron, & R. Thygesen (Eds.), *Transitions in the field of special education. Theoretical perspectives and implications for practice* (pp. 115–134). Waxmann Verlag.

Sundqvist, C., & Ström, K. (2015) Special education teachers as consultants: Perspectives of Finnish

teachers, *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation, 25*, 314-338. https://doi.org/10.1080/10474412.2014.948683

Sundqvist, C., von Ahlefeld, D., Ström, N., & Ström, K. (2014). Consultation in special needs education in Sweden and Finland: A comparative approach. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 29*, 297-312. https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2014.908022

Svens-Liavåg, C., Korhonen, J., & Arnolds-Granlund, S-B. (2024). School performance and behaviour

profiles among Finnish adolescents, and their relations with temperament traits: A person-

centred approach. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research, 68*, 605-618. https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2023.2175244

Takala, M., Kotilainen, N. & Sirkko, R. (2023). Laaja-alainen erityisopettaja tuen antajana. *Oppimisen ja oppimisvaikeuksien erityislehti*, *33*(3), 30-47. https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi-fe20231117147321

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2020). *Education policy outlook: Finland*. Author. https://www.oecd.org/education/policy-outlook/country-profile-Finland-2020.pdf

Van Loan, C. L., Garwood, J. D., Smith, S. W., & Daunic, A. P., (2019). Take CHARGE! A randomized controlled trial of social problem-solving curriculum to support students with emotional and behavioral disorders. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 27*, 143-153. https://doi.org/10.1177/1063426617754083

Weisberg, H. F., Krosnick, J. A., & Bowen, B. D. (1989). *An introduction to survey research and data analysis* (2nd ed.). Scott, Foresman and Company.

Whipp, A. M., Vuoksimaa, E., Bolhuis, K., de Zeeuw, E. L., Korhonen, T., Mauri, M., Pulkkinen, L., Rimfeld, K., Rose, R. J., Beijsterveldt C. T. E. M. V., Bartels, M., Plomin, R., Tiemeier, H., Kaprio, J., Boomsma, D. I. (2021). Teacher-rated aggression and co-occurring behaviors and emotional problems among schoolchildren in four population-based European cohorts. *PLoS One, 29*, e0238667. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0238667

Yada, A., & Savolainen, H. (2019). Japanese and Finnish teachers' perceptions and self-efficacy in inclusive education. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs, 19*(S1), 60-72. https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-3802.12478

Table 1

School, Respondent, and Student Characteristics

Characteristics	No. (%)
School/Program	
Grades	
1-9	48 (61.5)
7-9	30 (38.5)
School Participates in ProKoulu	
Yes	1 (1.3)
No	77 (98.7)
Additional Behavioral Support Provided	
Inclusive Setting	58 (74.4)
Individual or Small Group	20 (25.6)
Special Needs Teachers	
Gender	
Female	60 (76.9)
Male	18 (23.1)
Degree*	
Bachelor's	3 (3.8)
Master's	72 (92.3)
None of the Above	3 (3.8)
# Courses Focusing on Behavior	
0	5 (7.0)
1	10 (14.1)
2	20 (28.2)
3	12 (16.9)
4 or more	24 (33.8)

Note. * Total percentage does not equal 100% due to rounding.

Table 2

Special Education Teacher Views of Their Responsibilities

Support Provided to Students	% (n)				
	SD	**D**	**N**	**A**	**SA**
Behavioral Supports					
Give positive feedback directed at expected student behavior	-	-	-	21.8 (17)	78.2 (61)
Encourage students to behave as expected	-	-	-	28.2 (22)	71.8 (56)
Reinforce positive behavior by using concrete rewards	-	11.5 (9)	32.1 (25)	28.2 (22)	28.2 (22)
Oversee that school directives/rules are followed*	-	1.3 (1)	3.9 (3)	41.6 (32)	53.2 (41)
Provide students agreed sanctions for undesirable behavior (e.g., detention, detaining privileges)*	1.3 (1)	3.7 (3)	16.7 (13)	28.2 (22)	50.0 (30)
Provide anticipatory reminders to students about expected behavior	-	1.3 (1)	3.8 (3)	48.7 (38)	46.2 (36)
Cognitive-Behavioral Interventions					
Teach students to understand consequences of their actions	-	-	-	29.5 (23)	70.5 (55)
Teach students to monitor their own behavior	-	-	1.3 (1)	42.3 (33)	56.4 (44)
Teach student to analyze their behavior*	-	-	9.1 (7)	42.9 (33)	48.1 (37)
Teach positive alternatives to undesirable behavior	-	-	3.9 (3)	33.8 (26)	62.3 (48)
Teach students how to solve problems*	-	-	3.8 (3)	34.6 (27)	61.5 (48)
Teach students social skills	-	-	1.3 (1)	30.8 (24)	67.9 (53)
Teach students how to identify their feelings	-	-	7.7 (6)	41.0 (32)	51.3 (40)
Teach students how to identify feelings of others*	-	-	6.4 (5)	39.7 (31)	53.8 (42)
Teach students to express their feelings	-	1.3 (1)	6.4 (5)	43.6 (34)	48.7 (38)
Teach students to understand the feelings of others	-	-	5.1 (4)	43.6 (34)	51.3 (40)
Teach students expected behavior	-	-	5.1 (4)	44.9 (35)	50.0 (39)
Collaborate with Others					
Meet with guardians to discuss student behavior	-	-	2.6 (2)	26.9 (21)	70.5 (55)
Meet with professionals from other areas to discuss student behavior if necessary (within the limits of privacy protection legislation)	-	-	-	28.2 (22)	71.8 (56)
Teacher-Student Relationships					
Develop a positive relationship with students	-	-	-	15.4 (12)	84.6 (66)
Provide students with a trusted adult	-	-	-	10.3 (8)	89.7 (70)

Note. SD = strongly disagree; D = disagree; N = neither agree nor disagree; A = agree; SA = strongly agree; * = Values in the hundredths inhibit totals to equaling 100%.

Table 3

Approaches to Student Behavior

Support from Teacher	Frequency of Use % (n)					If Never Used, the Reasons						
	Always (Daily)	**Often (2-4 per week)**	**Sometimes (1-4 per month)**	**Never**	**IDK**	**More training**	**Lack of materials or resources**	**Doesn't help students**	**Doesn't match school approach**	**Doesn't match my approach**	**Not my responsibility**	**Lack of staff**
Check-in with student												
Meet with student at the beginning of the school day and remind about setting behavioral goals*	3.9 (3)	20.8 (16)	39.0 (30)	33.8 (26)	2.6 (2)	-	3	2	6	2	10	3
Meet with student at the beginning of the school day and encourage him/her/them to reach set behavioral goals*	7.8 (6)	19.5 (15)	37.7 (29)	32.5 (25)	2.6 (2)	-	3	1	6	2	10	3
Meet with students at the end of the school day to review the progress in behavioral goals	4.0 (3)	10.7 (8)	46.7 (35)	37.3 (28)	1.3 (1)	-	4	1	7	4	11	3
Meet with students at the end of the school day to give encouraging feedback about reaching behavioral goals	5.3 (4)	13.3 (10)	44.0 (33)	34.7 (26)	2.7 (2)	-	4	1	6	3	9	4

Note. If respondent marked "Never," he/she/they could mark all that apply for the reasons; * = Values in the hundredths inhibit totals to equaling 100%.

Table 3 Continued

Approaches to Student Behavior continued

Support from Teacher	Frequency of Use % (n)					If Never Used, the Reasons						
	Always (Daily)	**Often (2-4 per week)**	**Sometimes (1-4 per month)**	**Never**	**IDK**	**More training**	**Lack of materials or resources**	**Doesn't help students**	**Doesn't match school approach**	**Doesn't match my approach**	**Not my responsibility**	**Lack of staff**
Behavioral Interventions												
Provide positive feedback to encourage student to behave as expected	47.4 (36)	40.8 (31)	10.5 (8)	1.3 (1)	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-
Reinforce expected behavior with points/tokens	12.0 (9)	36.0 (27)	33.3 (25)	18.7 (14)	-	-	-	2	1	8	1	-
Reinforce expected behavior with individualized rewards	5.2 (4)	19.5 (15)	53.2 (41)	19.5 (15)	2.6 (2)	-	-	-	-	9	2	1
Remove student privileges for undesirable behavior	1.3 (1)	5.2 (4)	63.6 (49)	27.3 (21)	2.6 (2)	-	-	2	2	11	3	-
Give sanctions for undesirable behavior	20.8 (16)	55.8 (43)	23.4 (18)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Remove students from class (time-out)	2.7 (2)	-	49.3 (37)	48.0 (36)		-	-	7	4	18	1	2

Table 3 Continued

Approaches to Student Behavior continued

Support from Teacher	Frequency of Use % (n)					If Never Used, the Reasons						
	Always (Daily)	**Often (2-4 per week)**	**Sometimes (1-4 per month)**	**Never**	**IDK**	**More training**	**Lack of materials or resources**	**Doesn't help students**	**Doesn't match school approach**	**Doesn't match my approach**	**Not my responsibility**	**Lack of staff**
Behavioral Interventions												
Give students after school detention	-	1.3 (1)	49.3 (37)	38.7 (29)	10.7 (8)	-	1	3	2	18	2	-
Suspend students from school	-	-	6.7 (5)	72.0 (54)	21.3 (16)	-	-	3	5	13	27	2
Monitor Student Behavior												
Maintain a record of students' undesirable behaviors*	15.6 (12)	16.9 (13)	42.9 (33)	22.1 (17)	2.6 (2)	-	1	2	2	5	4	1
Maintain a record of students' exhibiting expected behaviors*	19.5 (15)	23.4 (18)	37.7 (29)	16.9 (13)	2.6 (2)	-	1	1	2	3	3	1

Note. If respondent marked "Never," he/she/they could mark all that apply for the reasons; * = Values in the hundredths inhibit totals to equaling 100%.

Table 3 Continued

Approaches to Student Behavior continued

Support from Teacher	Frequency of Use % (n)					If Never Used, the Reasons						
	Always (Daily)	**Often (2-4 per week)**	**Sometimes (1-4 per month)**	**Never**	**IDK**	**More training**	**Lack of materials or resources**	**Doesn't help students**	**Doesn't match school approach**	**Doesn't match my approach**	**Not my responsibility**	**Lack of staff**
Help students record frequency of their own undesirable behaviors	-	2.6 (2)	22.1 (17)	74.0 (57)	1.3 (1)	2	4	4	3	30	5	3
Help students record frequency of their own expected behaviors	2.6 (2)	3.9 (3)	20.8 (16)	70.1 (54)	2.6 (2)	2	5	5	6	24	6	4
Observe student during school day and record behavioral information*	6.6 (5)	13.2 (10)	31.6 (24)	48.7 (37)	-	-	8	1	4	16	4	3
Cognitive-Behavioral Interventions												
Teach students to monitor their own behavior*	14.3 (11)	46.8 (36)	33.8 (26)	2.6 (2)	2.6 (2)	-	-	-	-	1	-	1

Note. If respondent marked "Never," he/she/they could mark all that apply for the reasons; * = Values in the hundredths inhibit totals to equaling 100%.

Table 3 Continued

Approaches to Student Behavior continued

Support from Teacher	Frequency of Use % (n)					If Never Used, the Reasons						
	Always (Daily)	**Often (2-4 per week)**	**Sometimes (1-4 per month)**	**Never**	**IDK**	**More training**	**Lack of materials or resources**	**Doesn't help students**	**Doesn't match school approach**	**Doesn't match my approach**	**Not my responsibility**	**Lack of staff**
Cognitive-Behavioral Interventions												
Help students set personal goals	5.2 (4)	50.6 (39)	42.9 (33)	-		1.3 (1)	-	-	-	-	-	-
Teach students to identify their own feelings*	20.8 (16)	28.6 (22)	46.8 (36)	1.3 (1)		2.6 (2)	-	-	-	-	1	-
Teach student how her/his/their feelings influence behavior*	14.3 (11)	29.9 (23)	45.5 (35)	2.6 (2)		7.8 (6)	1	-	-	-	-	1
Meet with student individually to discuss her/his/their behavior	10.5 (8)	42.1 (32)	47.4 (36)	-		-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Table 3 Continued

Approaches to Student Behavior continued

Support from Teacher	Frequency of Use % (n)					If Never Used, the Reasons						
	Always (Daily)	**Often (2-4 per week)**	**Sometimes (1-4 per month)**	**Never**	**IDK**	**More training**	**Lack of materials or resources**	**Doesn't help students**	**Doesn't match school approach**	**Doesn't match my approach**	**Not my responsibility**	**Lack of staff**
Cognitive-Behavioral Interventions												
Teach students to manage their feelings	9.3 (7)	36.0 (27)	45.3 (34)	2.7 (2)	6.7 (5)	2	-	-	-	-	-	-
Teach students social skills*	28.9 (22)	44.7 (34)	22.4 (17)	2.6 (2)	1.3 (1)	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
Teach student how to solve problems*	20.8 (16)	33.8 (26)	40.3 (31)	1.3 (1)	3.9 (3)	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Collaborate with Others												
Contact guardians when student behaves inappropriately	17.1 (13)	23.7 (18)	56.6 (43)	2.6 (2)	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-
Report to a student's guardians when he/she/they behaves as expected*	16.9 (13)	48.1 (37)	33.8 (26)	-	1.3 (1)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Meet with professionals from other areas to discuss student behavior	14.3 (11)	46.8 (36)	39.0 (30)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Note. If respondent marked "Never," he/she/they could mark all that apply for the reasons; * = There are values in the hundredths that would be necessary to report for totals to equal 100%.

Table 3 Continued

Approaches to Student Behavior continued

Support from Teacher	Frequency of Use % (n)					If Never Used, the Reasons						
	Always (Daily)	**Often (2-4 per week)**	**Sometimes (1-4 per month)**	**Never**	**IDK**	**More training**	**Lack of materials or resources**	**Doesn't help students**	**Doesn't match school approach**	**Doesn't match my approach**	**Not my responsibility**	**Lack of staff**
Individualized Supports												
Ensure students are provided individual supports*	47.4 (36)	39.5 (30)	13.2 (10)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Assess which student problem behavior to prioritize*	23.4 (18)	37.7 (29)	33.8 (26)	2.6 (2)	2.86 (2)	-	-	-	-	2	-	-
Try to figure out the reasons for a student's behavior*	40.3 (31)	39.0 (30)	19.5 (15)	1.3 (1)	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-

Note. If respondent marked "Never," he/she/they could mark all that apply for the reasons; * = There are values in the hundredths that would be necessary to report for totals to equal 100%.

Table 4

Themes, Categories and the Number of Codes in Each

Theme: The most challenging problems out of SEN-teachers' control					
Main Category 1: Student-Related Factors		**Main Category 2: Structural Factors**			**Main Category 3: External Factors**
Category 1: Behavior management (*n* = 20)	Category 2: Student (*n* = 15)	Category 3: Collaboration (*n* = 15)	Category 4: School structure (*n* = 14)	Category 5: Pedagogical support provision (*n* = 7)	Category 6: External factors (*n* = 13)
Sub-category a: classroom management (*n* = 6)	Sub-category a: Student characteristics (*n* = 10)	Sub-category a: home-school collaboration (*n* = 9)	Sub-category a: schooling structure in grades 7-9 (*n* = 7)	Sub-category a: individualized pedagogical support in general classroom (*n* = 5)	Sub-category a: home (*n* = 9)
Sub-category b: unanticipated situations (*n* = 4)	Sub-category b: student behavior (*n* = 5)	Sub-category b: multi- and interprofessional collaboration (*n* = 3)	Sub-category b: resources (*n* = 4)	Sub-category b: classroom-wide pedagogical support (*n* = 2)	Sub-category b: other (*n* = 4)
Sub-category c: violence, aggression (*n* = 4)	-	Sub-category c: collaboration with colleagues (*n* = 3)	Sub-category c: SEN teacher's role (*n* = 3)	-	-
Sub-category d: connecting with a student (n=3)	-	-	-	-	-
Sub-category e: Teacher's self-control (*n* = 3)	-	-	-	-	-