

Navigating Untold Stories: The Lived Experiences of Special Education Teachers Teaching Students with Special Needs

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ABSTRACT: This study explored the lived experiences of Special Education (SNED) teachers when they handle learners with special needs, mostly paying attention to their instructional practices, coping ways, and how they collaborate with stakeholders. It used a qualitative phenomenological approach, and the data were gathered through deep, in-depth interviews with SNED teachers, so the team could catch the nuanced realities of their day to day work. Overall findings reveal that SNED teaching looks like continuous adaptive practice, in the sense that teachers manage high-intensity student behaviors while also doing individualized instructional planning, maintaining documentation, and coordinating with stakeholders at the same time, or at least trying to keep everything aligned. Four major problems came out clearly: dealing with high-intensity behavior management, the workload plus documentation pressures, gaps in home–school coordination, and financial barriers that limit support services. Collaboration with administrators, general education teachers, parents, and allied professionals was seen as both a crucial support system and a cause of extra coordination demands, and it affects how consistent the instruction stays, plus how well intervention fidelity is maintained. Teachers also used several coping mechanisms to stay engaged and keep instructional quality, like structured self-management, emotional regulation, endurance under sustained demands, adaptive instruction, and a kind of meaning-making through incremental student progress. The study suggests that SNED teaching effectiveness isn't only about teacher competence, but it's also shaped by systemic conditions, access to resources, and stakeholder collaboration, and these parts together decide what actually gets implemented in real settings. Because of these insights, the study proposes the ACT Model—Addressing Academic Demands, Collaboration with the Education Community, and Triumphs through Teaching as a framework meant to enhance instructional organization, improve collaboration, and support teacher well-being. Recommendations are offered for administrators, teachers, parents, policymakers, and future researchers, to help strengthen inclusive education practices, improve the sustainability of SNED teaching, and optimize learning outcomes for students with special needs.

KEYWORDS: ACT Model, behavior management, coping strategies, inclusive education, special education, SNED teachers, stakeholder collaboration.

I. INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental right of every learner, including students with special needs who require appropriate support to achieve their full potential. Special Education plays a vital role in promoting inclusive and equitable learning environments by addressing the diverse cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and physical needs of learners.

In recent years, the call for inclusive education, especially for special education classes, became more urgent, particularly in the Philippines where the number of children with special needs such as autism, ADHD, and other learning disabilities continued to increase. Inclusive education promoted the idea that students with special needs should be placed in general education classrooms, allowing them to interact with their peers and access the same curriculum. However, this approach presented significant challenges, especially for teachers who may have lacked the necessary training and resources to effectively address the diverse needs of these students.

Moreover, the education of students with special needs and developmental issues was supported by national laws and regulations in the Philippines. These regulations sought to advance inclusive education while giving instructors the assistance and tools they needed to successfully instruct students with special needs. The special education teachers and the receiving teachers in Mindanao regularly dealt with aggressive, disobedient, and impulsive behavior from students with exceptional needs. To control these behaviors, the teachers employed techniques such as token economy, prompting, and positive reinforcement. The lack of

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resources, inadequate training, and lack of support from parents and school administration were among the difficulties the teachers mentioned while trying to control the actions of children with special needs.

According to the study of Tuvida, V.L (2023), exceptional education instructors and the receiving teachers in Mindanao should have received ongoing training and assistance to help them become more adept at teaching behavioral issues that arose for students with special needs. The study also emphasized how crucial it was to include parents and school officials in controlling the conduct of students with special needs.

What further distinguishes this study is its explicit emphasis on collaboration as a central component of the teaching experience. By exploring how Special Needs Education (SNED) teachers interact and collaborate with school administrators, general education teachers, parents, and allied professionals, the study provides a holistic understanding of how collaborative relationships shape instructional practices, professional identity, emotional well-being, and job satisfaction.

This research focuses on its teacher-centered, collaboration-focused, and context-sensitive exploration of Special Education teaching, offering practical and theoretical contributions to inclusive education and teacher well-being.

Theoretical framework

This study was anchored on several interrelated theories that provided insight into the lived experiences of Special Needs Education (SNED) teachers teaching students with special needs. These theories explained not only the challenges and opportunities teachers faced but also the ways they adapted, coped, and made meaning of their professional roles.

Constructivist Theory of Learning (Vygotsky, 197)

Vygotsky's constructivism emphasized that learning was a social process shaped by interaction, culture, and context. Special education teachers facilitated learning by scaffolding instruction and providing individualized support for students with special needs. This theory underscored the importance of teacher mediation in helping students reach their "zone of proximal development" despite cognitive, behavioral, or physical challenges. It framed how teachers adapted pedagogy and assessed progress based on students' unique needs.

It was relevant to this study as it framed the pedagogical role of special education teachers in facilitating learning among students with special needs. Teachers were not merely transmitters of knowledge but active mediators who scaffolded instruction and created supportive environments that allowed students to progress within their zone of proximal development. In the context of this study, the theory provided a lens to understand how teachers adapted strategies, modified lessons, and used interactive methods to meet the unique needs of exceptional students. It also highlighted the relational aspect of teaching, where collaboration, cultural context, and teacher-student interaction were central to successful learning experiences.

Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1997)

Bandura's self-efficacy theory suggested that individuals' belief in their ability to execute tasks influenced performance and persistence. For special education teachers, strong self-efficacy led to greater confidence in teaching diverse students, designing interventions, and advocating for students' needs. Conversely, low self-efficacy may have resulted in stress, reduced motivation, and burnout.

It connected to this study by emphasizing the role of teachers' confidence in their ability to handle diverse students and classroom challenges. Teachers with higher self-efficacy were more likely to persevere in the face of difficulties, employed innovative teaching strategies, and advocated for their students' rights and needs. Conversely, those with lower self-efficacy experienced heightened stress, decreased motivation, and even burnout.

Together, these two theories provided complementary perspectives for this study. Constructivism explained how teachers facilitated and shaped learning processes for exceptional students, while Self-Efficacy Theory explained how teachers' internal beliefs shaped their effectiveness, resilience, and lived experiences. Integrating these theories allowed a deeper exploration of both the instructional practices and the personal-professional dimensions that defined the untold stories of special education teachers.

Research Question

This study aims to explore and analyze the strategies This study explored and analyzed the strategies employed by teachers in managing students with special needs.

Specifically, it answered the following questions:

1. How do Special Needs Education (SNED) teachers describe their lived experiences in teaching students with special needs?

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2. What challenges do Special Needs Education (SNED) teachers encounter in teaching students with special needs inside and outside the classroom?
3. How does collaboration with school administrators, general education teachers, parents, and other professionals influence Special Needs Education (SNED) teacher's instructional practices, professional identity, and overall teaching experiences in supporting students with special needs?
4. How do Special Needs Education (SNED) teachers cope with the academic, emotional, and professional demands of teaching students with special needs, including those arising from collaborative responsibilities?
5. What insights can be drawn from the significant experiences of teachers handling learners with special needs?
6. Based on the findings of the study, what inclusion framework may be developed to reflect Special Needs Education (SNED) teachers' academic demands, collaboration with the education community, and triumphs through teaching?

II. SCOPE AND LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This study focused on the lived experiences of Special Needs Education (SNED) teachers teaching students with special needs in public elementary schools within the City Schools Division of Bacoar. The scope was limited to teachers who were currently engaged in special education classrooms in public schools and who had direct experience in teaching students with special needs such as physical, cognitive, emotional, or behavioral needs, in order to describe their most significant experiences. This was conducted in the school year 2025-2026.

The study did not cover the perspectives of administrators, parents, general education teachers, therapists, or students themselves, as it centered exclusively on the voices of the seven participating Special Education (SNED) teachers in Bacoar. Specifically, the teacher perspectives included in the study were those of SNED teachers who directly handle learners with special needs and who have firsthand experience in individualized instruction, behavior management, IEP-related planning and documentation, collaboration with parents and general education teachers, and coordination with school administrators and other support systems. Their voices represent professional accounts of teaching within SNED and inclusive education contexts in local schools, particularly how they interpret their challenges, coping mechanisms, instructional strategies, and collaboration experiences.

The experiences of these SNED teachers reveal both the promise and the persistent challenges of practicing inclusive education in Bacoar schools. Their narratives describe inclusion as meaningful but demanding work, requiring them to balance individualized support for learners with diverse needs against the realities of large class sizes, limited resources, documentation demands, behavior-related concerns, and varying levels of support from stakeholders. They emphasized that successful inclusion depends on strong collaboration with school heads, parents, general education teachers, and, where available, allied professionals, while also recognizing the importance of alignment with Department of Education policies. The participating teachers also expressed the need for continuing professional development, access to appropriate instructional materials, manageable documentation systems, and institutional recognition of their specialized roles. Despite these challenges, their accounts reflect resilience, commitment, and a strong belief in the potential of learners with special needs, showing that inclusive education is not merely a policy mandate but a shared educational responsibility requiring sustained support, innovation, and systemic improvement.

Furthermore, the study did not attempt to quantify outcomes or measure the academic performance of learners with special needs. Instead, it provided a qualitative exploration of the professional and personal experiences of SNED teachers as they navigated instructional, emotional, behavioral, and collaborative demands. Therefore, the findings may not be generalized to all SNED or inclusive education contexts, but they offer meaningful insights within the scope of the study area, participant group, and local educational setting.

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design, specifically a phenomenological approach, to explore and understand the lived experiences of Special Needs Education (SNED) teachers teaching students with special needs. Qualitative research is appropriate for this study because it focuses on capturing human experiences, perceptions, and meanings rather than measuring variables numerically. By using a phenomenological design, the study aims to uncover the essence of the teachers' experiences, providing a rich and in-depth understanding of their professional and personal realities.

Phenomenology is particularly suitable for this research as it emphasizes participants' subjective experiences and seeks to describe how individuals perceive and make sense of their lived experiences. In the context of Special Education, phenomenology allows the researcher to explore the challenges, coping strategies, collaborative practices, instructional methods, and professional

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insights of teachers in their natural educational settings. This approach enables the study to highlight not only the difficulties encountered but also the strategies and meanings that teachers derive from their experiences.

Selection of Co-Participants

The study employed purposive sampling to select seven Special Needs education (SNED) teachers from the Division of Bacoar City who had active participation in teaching SNED students. Co-participants were chosen based on the following criteria: (1) were currently employed as SNED teachers, (2) had at least one year of experience in teaching SNED, and (3) were willing to share experiences related to institutional support, motivation, and challenges.

The number of co-participants was intended to ensure data saturation, with interviews continuing until no new significant themes emerged. This selection strategy was designed to capture diverse perspectives across varying levels of academic experience and engagement, thereby enriching the data for in-depth qualitative analysis.

Data Generation

Data were collected primarily through semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to share their experiences freely while enabling the researcher to probe deeper into relevant aspects of collaboration, instructional practices, and emotional and professional challenges. Additional qualitative data were gathered through observations and document analysis (e.g., lesson plans, school records) to provide contextual understanding and triangulation of findings.

The study used purposeful sampling to select Special Needs Education (SNED) teachers who had at least two years of teaching experience with students with special needs. This ensured that participants had sufficient professional experience to provide meaningful and reflective accounts of their lived experiences.

Finally, the collected data underwent thematic analysis, following the phenomenological framework, to identify recurring themes, patterns, and insights that represented the essence of the participants' experiences. The analysis focused on capturing the depth, richness, and complexity of teachers' experiences, including the role of collaboration with administrators, colleagues, parents, and allied professionals in shaping their teaching practices and professional growth.

The data-gathering procedure followed a three-phase protocol. First, the researcher secured formal approval from the division office and obtained informed consent from each participant, with clear communication regarding confidentiality, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw at any stage. Second, interviews were scheduled at times convenient for participants and were conducted either in person or via secure online platforms. The researcher maintained neutrality and consistency throughout the interviews. Third, all recordings were transcribed and anonymized. Digital data were stored securely on password-protected devices, and hard copies of consent forms were kept in locked storage accessible only to the researcher. The data generation phase was expected to be completed within a three-week period to ensure saturation of information while minimizing disruption to participants' training and academic responsibilities.

Thematic Reflection

Thematic reflection in this study followed a systematic and iterative process designed to capture the depth and complexity of SNED teachers' lived experiences regarding institutional support, achievement motivation, and challenges. This section outlined the phases that were undertaken to analyze and interpret the narrative data collected from the co-participants.

Familiarization with Data. All interview transcripts were read and re-read to develop an in-depth understanding of participants' responses. This immersion allowed the researcher to gain an intuitive sense of the data and identified initial impressions, contextual nuances, and meaningful patterns embedded in the narratives.

Initial Coding. Significant statements, phrases, and expressions from the transcripts were highlighted and assigned descriptive codes. These codes reflected key ideas and insights related to SNED teachers' perceptions of institutional support, challenges faced, adaptation practices, and strategies for training and career identity formation.

Generating Categories and Clusters. The initial codes were reviewed and organized into meaningful categories representing common patterns and shared experiences among participants. This stage facilitated the grouping of similar codes into clusters aligned with the core dimensions of the research questions.

Formation of Themes. The categories were synthesized into broader themes that encapsulated the essence of participants' perspectives and practices. Themes were articulated to reflect recurring insights on institutional support, achievement motivation, challenges encountered, and recommended interventions for training and career identity formation.

Interpretation and Reflection. Each theme was interpreted through reflective analysis, linking participants' experiences to relevant theoretical perspectives on achievement motivation, challenges, and institutional support. The researcher also examined

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contextual factors within the City Schools Division of Bacoor that influenced SNED teachers' motivation, identity, and adaptation practices.

Theme Validation. To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the analysis, member checking was conducted, where selected participants reviewed the interpreted themes to confirm accuracy. Peer debriefing with academic mentors was also undertaken to ensure that the coding and thematic structure were coherent and valid.

Synthesis and Integration. The final set of themes was synthesized into a cohesive narrative, integrating insights across all participants. This synthesis provided a comprehensive understanding of how SNED teachers perceived, navigated, and adapted to challenges in sustaining motivation and professional identity. The themes were also examined in relation to existing literature to highlight the contributions of this study and identify gaps addressed by the research.

III. RESULTS

This chapter presents, analyzes, and interprets the qualitative data gathered from in-depth interviews with selected Special Needs Education (SNED) teachers regarding their experiences and perceptions of teaching students with special needs. Using thematic analysis, responses were coded, clustered, and interpreted to identify recurring patterns and significant insights related to mental preparedness. Direct excerpts from the participants are included to highlight their voices and contextualize the findings within special education settings. The data are organized according to key themes derived from the interview guide. This chapter serves as the core of the study's findings, offering a deep understanding of the lived experience of Special Education Teachers.

Profile of the SNED Teacher-Participants

The seven (7) participants came from varied professional pathways in special education, and their backgrounds reflect differences in gender, educational attainment, and years of teaching experience. Five (5) participants were female and two (2) were male. In terms of qualifications, four participants completed a Bachelor of Elementary Education major in Special Education, while three participants completed a Master of Arts in Education major in Special Education. Their teaching experience ranged from two to thirteen years, allowing the study to capture both early-career adjustment and long-term immersion in the realities of SNED work. These demographic features help contextualize how professional competence is built through repeated classroom encounters, exposure to diverse disability profiles, and sustained engagement with individualized instruction and inclusion-related responsibilities.

Dora

Dora is a female teacher who completed a Bachelor of Elementary Education major in Special Education and has seven years of experience. Her background was shaped by working with learners across a broad age range, from early childhood through adolescence. She emphasized functional and developmental priorities such as foundational learning skills, functional academics, daily living skills, and early pre-vocational preparation, particularly among learners with autism. Her background also reflects engagement with Special Needs Education work in the public school setting, suggesting familiarity with program expectations and the day-to-day demands of structured SNED instruction.

Arjay

Arjay is a male teacher who completed a Bachelor of Elementary Education major in Special Education and has thirteen years of experience, representing the longest-serving participant. His background includes working with multiple disability categories, including learners with hearing impairment, autism, intellectual disabilities, and attention-related concerns. The breadth of his experience suggests long-term practice in adjusting instruction and classroom management across different learner profiles, and it reflects sustained exposure to the practical challenges of SNED service delivery over time.

Camille

Camille is a female teacher who completed a Bachelor of Elementary Education major in Special Education and has six years of experience. Her background was described less through a listing of assignments and more through the felt intensity of SNED work. She characterized her teaching experience as overwhelming and shaped by ongoing changes within the Special Needs Education Program. This indicates a professional background defined by adaptability, where routine teaching responsibilities are repeatedly recalibrated in response to shifting program demands and classroom realities.

Pog

Pog is a male teacher who completed a Bachelor of Elementary Education major in Special Education and has eight years of experience. He described extensive work in a public elementary context and emphasized broad exposure to learners with autism, intellectual disability, learning disabilities, sensory impairments, attention-related difficulties, and speech-motor challenges. He differentiated between experiences in self-contained settings, which require intensive early intervention and daily skill-building,

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and mainstreaming-related work, which requires coordinating supports to help learners participate in general education environments.

Celyn

Celyn is a female teacher who completed a Master of Arts in Education major in Special Education and has two years of experience, offering an early-career perspective. Her background emphasizes collaborative practice, including close work with learners and active coordination with parents and other teachers. Her account reflects the foundational work of learning to implement individualized strategies, build learning routines, and support inclusion, while developing confidence and competence in navigating complex learner needs.

Lovely

Lovely is a female teacher who completed a Master of Arts in Education major in Special Education and has eleven years of experience. Her background reflects long-term engagement in SNED teaching, indicating sustained exposure to the demands of supporting diverse learners over many years. While she provided fewer details about specific placements, her length of service suggests an experienced practitioner's familiarity with maintaining instructional continuity, managing classroom challenges over time, and adapting practice as learner needs and school contexts change.

Glecy

Glecy is a female teacher who completed a Master of Arts in Education major in Special Education and has six years of experience. She described a non-linear pathway into special education, beginning in nursing before moving into education after early exposure to a SNED school environment. Her background includes completing education preparation, obtaining licensure, and pursuing graduate SNED study, alongside teaching across early childhood and higher education contexts. This pathway suggests a layered professional development trajectory, where continued training and varied teaching roles contributed to her SNED competence.

Across these backgrounds, gender, educational attainment, and years of experience intersect with how participants entered and practiced special education. Teachers with longer years of experience described broader exposure and sustained adjustment to evolving classroom needs, while those earlier in their careers emphasized collaboration and learning the demands of individualized planning. Taken together, the profiles show SNED teaching as a practice developed over time through ongoing classroom interaction, continuous skill-building, and persistent response to the realities of learners with special needs.

SOP 1: How do Special Education teachers describe their lived experiences in teaching students with special needs?

The results on the significant experiences of the seven Special Needs Education (SNED) teachers' present a detailed picture of how their lived realities shape day-to-day performance in teaching learners with special needs. Across narratives, teaching effectiveness is not described only in terms of delivering lessons, but in sustaining individualized instruction, managing behavior and emotional regulation needs, monitoring IEP goals, and documenting progress while navigating administrative and resource constraints. Participants consistently framed performance as adaptive work, where instruction is continuously adjusted through scaffolding, visual and hands-on supports, structured routines, and differentiated activities to match learners' readiness and behavioral states. At the same time, their accounts show that professional effectiveness is strongly influenced by contextual conditions, including workload intensity, availability of materials, collaboration with parents and general education teachers, and the quality of administrative support. Together, these experiences highlight how SNED teachers' performance is both relational and situational, sustained through persistence, coping strategies, and a strong sense of meaning drawn from students' incremental gains, increased independence, and successful transitions toward inclusion.

Significant Experiences of Dora

Table 1a: Significant Experiences of Dora

<i>"It depends on my students' mood... some days can also be tiring."</i>
<i>"Very fulfilling... achieved a goal... practicing sitting and waiting tolerance... I appreciate any small achievements."</i>
<i>"I commonly use hands-on materials... to learn from experience."</i>
<i>"I create beginner and advance works... Using mostly words... is ineffective. Students need... tangible objects."</i>
<i>"I find it difficult to communicate to some parents who need more support to their child."</i>
<i>"It affects the consistency I need to address and develop to my students."</i>
<i>"Our school administrator listens, respects and supports... provides feedback and suggestions... for awareness."</i>
<i>"We do rounds... ask about progress and share recommendations... I give feedback to parents right after the class."</i>

Dora's accounts portray special education teaching as emotionally variable, effort-intensive, and highly responsive to learners' day-to-day regulation. She described the rhythm of instruction as contingent on affect and stamina, noting, "It depends on my students' mood... some days can also be tiring." This statement signals that teaching is not experienced as a fixed routine but as continual adjustment to students' readiness and emotional states. This kind of emotional and instructional labor is frequently tied to role overload and the high demands of supporting diverse needs with limited resources, which contribute to stress and burnout risk among SNED teachers (e.g., Abina et al., 2022; Şanal, 2023; Downey and Ambrose, 2024). For Dora, the "tiring" nature of the work is not framed as failure but as a built-in condition of practice when student engagement and regulation fluctuate.

At the same time, Dora's narrative is strongly anchored in meaning-making through small, observable progress. She emphasized how rewarding incremental attainment is, stating, "Very fulfilling... achieved a goal... practicing sitting and waiting tolerance... I appreciate any small achievements." This is a concrete illustration of how SNED teachers often recalibrate what counts as success toward micro-skills that are foundational for learning participation and social functioning. Through the lens of self-efficacy theory, these small wins function as mastery experiences, the strongest source of efficacy beliefs, because they provide direct evidence that the teacher's actions can produce desired outcomes. In other words, the repeated experience of "achieved a goal" becomes psychological fuel that supports persistence even when days are tiring. This aligns with higher teacher self-efficacy predicts instructional persistence and resilience to stressors, while protecting against withdrawal and attrition under demanding conditions.

Dora's instructional descriptions also align closely with constructivist learning principles, particularly learning through interaction with materials, scaffolding, and differentiated access to tasks. She explained, "I commonly use hands-on materials... to learn from experience," and further clarified her rationale for adapting instruction: "I create beginner and advance works... Using mostly words... is ineffective. Students need... tangible objects." These responses fit a constructivist view in which learners build understanding through active engagement with concrete experiences, and the teacher's role is to mediate learning by selecting tools, structuring tasks, and calibrating challenge. The emphasis on "tangible objects" is also consistent with inclusive constructivist practices where scaffolding and differentiated instruction support participation and learning in diverse classrooms, although implementation can be constrained by time, materials, and training. Dora's practice indicates an intuitive alignment with constructivist pedagogy: she reduces reliance on abstract verbal instruction and instead designs learning experiences that students can manipulate, observe, and practice repeatedly, which is especially relevant for learners who benefit from concrete supports.

Her challenges show how self-efficacy is not only built through student progress but also threatened when essential environmental supports are inconsistent. She stated, "I find it difficult to communicate to some parents who need more support to their child," and explained the consequence: "It affects the consistency I need to address and develop to my students." This captures a core dynamic in SNED work: student progress often depends on continuity between school routines and home reinforcement, and when communication is difficult, the teacher's instructional plan loses stability across contexts. In self-efficacy terms, inconsistent follow-through can weaken a teacher's sense of control over outcomes, because the effectiveness of classroom strategies becomes partly contingent on factors outside the teacher's direct influence. Studies emphasize the importance of involving parents and administrators in addressing learners' behavioral and learning needs, and they highlight that weak

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stakeholder collaboration and limited parent capacity can hinder consistency and intervention success (Tuvida, 2023; Abina et al., 2022). DORA’s focus on “consistency” is also compatible with behavior-support where structured routines and predictable expectations are seen as stabilizing conditions for learners with behavioral and self-regulation needs (Rose and Dalton, 2021; Sieber, 2020).

Finally, Dora’s comments on school-level collaboration suggest protective factors that can buffer stress and strengthen efficacy. She described administrative support in relational and practical terms: “Our school administrator listens, respects and supports... provides feedback and suggestions... for awareness.” She also described routine coordination and feedback mechanisms with stakeholders: “We do rounds... ask about progress and share recommendations... I give feedback to parents right after the class.” These statements point to an ecology of support where consultation, monitoring, and quick feedback loops are normalized. Under self-efficacy theory, such environments can strengthen efficacy through social persuasion (credible feedback that one is capable) and through reduced uncertainty about instructional decisions because teachers have a sounding board. They also address concerns raised about insufficient administrative support and the way systemic constraints intensify emotional labor in SNED teaching; Dora’s experience shows that when leadership is perceived as responsive, it can function as a job resource that offsets high job demands.

Dora’s significant experiences show a teacher who constructs learning through concrete, scaffolded experiences and who sustains commitment through mastery moments, while simultaneously negotiating the fragile “consistency” required for student development in contexts where caregiver support and communication vary.

Significant Experiences of Arjay

Table 1b: Significant Experiences of Arjay

<i>“Struggling, information overload and survival.”</i>
<i>“Handling... three or 4 different types of disabilities... not all sacrifices and efforts can be recognized.”</i>
<i>“Sometimes I’m authoritarian... but all the time I’m the person in authority.”</i>
<i>“Realia... and real pictures... best in presenting lessons.”</i>
<i>“Biting, spitting, kicking, punching... physical attacks... I make defensive position... calm them down.”</i>
<i>“I’ve been traumatized... totally unpredictable... triggers my anxiety.”</i>
<i>“School heads... very supportive... they’re trying to learn what special ed is.”</i>
<i>“Most of the time we are begging... to the regular teachers... lack of support and implementation... financial issues becomes the barrier.”</i>

Arjay’s narrative frames special education teaching as an experience of sustained pressure and cognitive load, captured in the blunt description, “Struggling, information overload and survival.” This language signals that the daily work is not merely demanding but experienced as coping and endurance, which aligns with Philippine and international findings that SNED teachers carry heavy workloads, multiple roles, and high emotional labor, particularly when resources and training are limited. The sense of “survival” is also associated with elevated burnout risk among special education teachers when job demands exceed available job resources, especially under conditions of limited professional development and uneven institutional support (Downey and Ambrose, 2024; Şanal, 2023; Macabenta et al., 2023; Abina et al., 2022). In this context, Arjay’s statement can be read as an experiential marker of chronic strain rather than a momentary complaint.

A key contributor to this strain is the complexity of their caseload. Arjay described “Handling... three or 4 different types of disabilities... not all sacrifices and efforts can be recognized.” The excerpt points to two interconnected issues. First is the instructional challenge of designing appropriate learning pathways for students with different disability profiles within one setting, an issue repeatedly documented in local studies where mixed disabilities in one classroom and limited supports increase planning demands and role overload (Abina et al., 2022). Second is the social dimension of professional invisibility or low recognition, which matters because recognition often functions as feedback about competence and value. Under self-efficacy theory, the absence of acknowledgment can weaken efficacy beliefs over time, not because the teacher lacks skill, but because the environment provides fewer affirmations and fewer visible indicators that efforts are working and valued. This helps explain why Arjay’s overall framing leans toward “survival” even while they continue performing complex work.

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Arjay's classroom life is also defined by behavioral crises and safety management, which they described with specificity: "Biting, spitting, kicking, punching... physical attacks... I make defensive position... calm them down." This is not a generic reference to "challenging behavior" but a description of direct physical risk, requiring immediate de-escalation while maintaining safety. Their additional statement, "I've been traumatized... totally unpredictable... triggers my anxiety," shows the psychological cost of unpredictability and repeated exposure to aggression. Many teachers enter the profession with insufficient preparation in classroom management for behavioral challenges, and that inclusion and SNED contexts can intensify stress when training and supports are inadequate (Mitchell, 2024; Woodcock and Hardy, 2022). It also supports Tuvida's (2023) argument that teachers need ongoing training and assistance to handle behavioral issues effectively, and that coordinated involvement of parents and school officials is crucial. From a self-efficacy perspective, repeated unpredictable aggression can erode efficacy through negative physiological and affective states, where anxiety becomes evidence to the teacher that the environment is uncontrollable, even when they are applying appropriate strategies.

At the same time, Arjay's descriptions show purposeful instructional adaptation that fits a constructivist view of learning as active, supported, and grounded in concrete experience. Their preference for "Realia... and real pictures... best in presenting lessons" indicates that they are deliberately reducing abstraction and increasing meaningful sensory and contextual cues so students can build understanding from tangible representations. This is consistent with constructivist principles and with inclusive teaching that highlights the importance of mediated learning, task scaffolding, and differentiated supports to help diverse learners access content. The challenge is that constructivist practices often require teacher capital, such as time, training, and materials, which are commonly limited in low-resource contexts. Arjay's reliance on real objects and visuals can therefore be interpreted as both a pedagogical choice and an adaptive response to what works in their setting despite constraints, echoing findings that teachers often improvise and build informal strategies when specialized resources are scarce.

Arjay's classroom management stance also reflects a tension between ideal student-centered interaction and the practical need for control and safety. They admitted, "Sometimes I'm authoritarian... but all the time I'm the person in authority." In constructivist classrooms, authority is often shared through guided participation, interaction, and scaffolding rather than constant direct control. However, Arjay's context includes severe and unpredictable aggression, so a more directive posture can function as a protective structure to maintain order, predictability, and safety. This fits behavior-support emphasizing the value of clear routines and structured environments for learners who struggle with regulation, where predictability can reduce anxiety and escalation (Rose and Dalton, 2021; Sieber, 2020). Seen this way, Arjay's "authoritarian" stance is less about dominance and more about securing the conditions that make learning possible, especially when safety is at stake.

Finally, Arjay's experiences highlight how stakeholder collaboration can either buffer or intensify teaching stress. On one hand, they acknowledged, "School heads... very supportive... they're trying to learn what special ed is," suggesting relational support, but also implying that leadership is still developing SNED-specific understanding. On the other hand, they expressed a sharper concern about cross-role and resource barriers: "Most of the time we are begging... to the regular teachers... lack of support and implementation... financial issues becomes the barrier." This resonates strongly with the policy-to-practice gaps and inconsistent implementation of inclusive education, where inclusion requires shared responsibility but is undermined by limited buy-in, limited training, and resource constraints (Tuvida, 2023; Macabenta et al., 2023; Nugraha et al., 2023). Under self-efficacy theory, supportive leadership can provide social persuasion and practical resources that strengthen coping, but weak collaboration and financial barriers reduce the teacher's perceived control over outcomes, especially when home support and general education cooperation are necessary for consistency.

Arjay's significant experiences portray a teacher working at the intersection of complex multi-disability demands, high-risk behavioral realities, and uneven stakeholder support, while still applying concrete, learner-accessible instructional approaches. Constructivist theory helps explain the logic of using realia and visuals to build learning through experience, while self-efficacy theory clarifies how daily mastery efforts are challenged by unpredictability, low recognition, and systemic barriers, yet partially buffered by supportive, if still SNED-learning, school leadership.

Significant Experiences of Camille

Table 1c: Significant Experiences of Camille

<i>"It feels like I am always wearing a different masks."</i>
<i>"Witness the progress... from... wasn't able to sit... 3 minutes... after more than a year... 5 mins."</i>
<i>"Be flexible and creative... getting their interests..."</i>
<i>"If the learners are not yet ready, I will modify the lesson... accommodation and modification."</i>
<i>"Follow up support at home... parents... continue our practices... at their houses."</i>
<i>"Second, the expensive cost of therapies."</i>
<i>"They are very supportive and really open for Special Needs Education."</i>
<i>"It's lack of collaboration for some of my parents."</i>

Camille's accounts foreground the identity work of being a special education teacher, describing the role as continually shifting across functions and expectations. The statement, "It feels like I am always wearing a different masks," captures role multiplicity, suggesting that teaching is not limited to instruction but extends into caregiving, behavior support, coordination, and emotional regulation work. This aligns with the pattern reported, in which SNED teachers experience role overload and emotional labor, often acting as teacher, therapist, record-keeper, and family liaison in the same workday, particularly in contexts with limited specialized personnel and resources (Abina et al., 2022; Macabenta et al., 2023). In self-efficacy terms, constantly "wearing different masks" can be psychologically costly because it expands the performance demands teachers evaluate themselves against, which may increase vulnerability to stress if the teacher perceives insufficient preparation or support for each "mask."

Despite these pressures, Camille identifies meaning and professional affirmation through micro-level developmental gains. The teacher emphasized, "Witness the progress... from... wasn't able to sit... 3 minutes... after more than a year... 5 mins." This excerpt shows how progress in SNED teaching is often slow, non-linear, and measured in incremental shifts in self-regulation or task engagement rather than immediate academic performance. Through the lens of self-efficacy theory, these small improvements operate as mastery experiences, the most influential source of efficacy beliefs, because they provide concrete evidence that consistent teacher actions produce change over time. The emphasis on "witness" is also important: it signals that the teacher experiences progress as something observed and emotionally registered, not merely documented. This aligns with claims that higher teacher self-efficacy supports persistence, coping, and willingness to continue using differentiated strategies, while buffering stress and reducing the risk of attrition (Downey and Ambrose, 2024).

Camille's instructional stance reflects a constructivist orientation in how learning is made accessible through flexibility, interest, and responsiveness to readiness. The teacher advised, "Be flexible and creative... getting their interests..." and explained, "If the learners are not yet ready, I will modify the lesson... accommodation and modification." These statements indicate that Camille does not treat curriculum as fixed content to be delivered, but as an adaptive plan shaped by learner readiness and engagement. From a constructivist perspective, this is consistent with the idea that learners build understanding through supported interaction with tasks that are appropriately challenging, and that teaching involves scaffolding and mediation rather than uniform transmission. This is also consistent with the constructivist learning environments supporting inclusive practice through scaffolding and differentiated instruction, while recognizing that effective implementation depends on teacher capacity and available support.

The challenges Camille highlights show how home and economic conditions directly affect the continuity required for learning and behavior support. The teacher noted, "Follow up support at home... parents... continue our practices... at their houses," but also identified a barrier: "It's lack of collaboration for some of my parents." This points to uneven home follow-through, where some families may sustain routines while others cannot or do not, creating discontinuity between school-based interventions and home environments. Camille further emphasized structural constraints through the statement, "Second, the expensive cost of therapies." These excerpts align with Philippine findings that resource constraints, parental educational limitations, and financial barriers disrupt continuity of intervention and participation in support services, complicating teachers' efforts to maintain consistent skill-building across contexts (Abina et al., 2022; Tuvida, 2023). Under self-efficacy theory, inconsistent home implementation and limited access to therapy can reduce a teacher's perceived control over student outcomes, because progress becomes partly dependent on factors outside classroom reach, even when instruction is well designed.

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At the same time, Camille's account suggests that supportive administration can function as a protective resource that stabilizes practice and sustains teacher efficacy. The teacher reported, "They are very supportive and really open for Special Needs Education." This type of leadership support aligns with administrative support as a key job resource that can mitigate stress, especially in environments where teachers face heavy caseloads, limited materials, and complex learner needs. In self-efficacy terms, supportive administrators can contribute to efficacy through social persuasion, encouragement, and structural problem-solving that reduces uncertainty and isolation.

Camille's significant experiences show a teacher who constructs learning through adaptation to readiness and interest, measures success through small but meaningful gains, and simultaneously navigates the strain of role multiplicity and the instability created by uneven parent collaboration and therapy costs. Constructivist theory helps explain why Camille prioritizes flexibility, interest-based engagement, and lesson modification as pathways for learners to build understanding and participation. Self-efficacy theory clarifies how the ability to "witness" incremental progress can strengthen persistence, while inconsistent home support and financial barriers can undermine perceived control and heighten stress, making stakeholder collaboration and administrative openness critical for sustaining both effective practice and teacher resilience.

Significant Experiences of Pog

Table 1d: Significant Experiences of Pog

<i>"Preparing IMs... one-on-one or small-group... managing behavior... monitoring IEP goals... document progress... unpredictable, but purposeful."</i>
<i>"Learner... struggled with basic routines... eventually participate independently... inclusion... small or big... achievement."</i>
<i>"Structured routines... schedule board... visual supports... behavior chart... multisensory... UDL... positive reinforcement."</i>
<i>"Simplifying instructions... break complex tasks... smaller steps (chunk method)... visual schedule... improved focus and independence."</i>
<i>"Managing behavior... short attention spans... communication difficulties... balancing administrative tasks with teaching."</i>
<i>"Procuring materials was difficult because of the outdated DepEd list."</i>
<i>"Regular coordination... provide guidance on accommodations... behavior strategies... joint planning."</i>
<i>"Regularly update... hoping to continue in their home... Building trust... strengthen home-school partnership."</i>

Pog's account presents special education teaching as intensive multi-tasking that combines instruction, behavior support, and accountability work, yet remains grounded in purpose. The teacher described the daily workload as "Preparing IMs... one-on-one or small-group... managing behavior... monitoring IEP goals... document progress... unpredictable, but purposeful." This single excerpt captures the role overload commonly reported in Philippine studies, where SNED teachers function simultaneously as lesson designer, behavior manager, case monitor, and documentation officer, often under resource constraints and time pressure (Macabenta et al., 2023; Abina et al., 2022). In self-efficacy terms, this kind of role density can threaten efficacy when demands outpace perceived capacity, but POG's phrase "purposeful" suggests a strong meaning framework that helps them interpret unpredictability as part of the work rather than as evidence of incompetence. This matters because teachers with stronger efficacy beliefs tend to persist and continue problem-solving even under complex conditions, while lower efficacy is associated with frustration and higher attrition risk, consistent with the retention and coping patterns (Downey and Ambrose, 2024).

Pog also frames success through inclusion and independence milestones, emphasizing how progress is often incremental but deeply meaningful. The teacher recalled a learner who "struggled with basic routines... eventually participate independently... inclusion... small or big... achievement." This statement shows that inclusion is not treated as a label or placement, but as a developmental process where students build the skills needed to participate with increasing autonomy. From a self-efficacy perspective, these independence gains act as mastery evidence for the teacher: seeing a learner move from dependence to "participate independently" strengthens the belief that instructional and behavioral supports are effective, which can sustain motivation across setbacks. It also aligns with how SNED teachers often locate professional satisfaction in small but functional gains that have real implications for learner participation and family life, even when broader system barriers remain.

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Pog's instructional practices strongly reflect constructivist principles of scaffolding, mediated learning, and differentiated access. The teacher described using "Structured routines... schedule board... visual supports... behavior chart... multisensory... UDL... positive reinforcement," and further explained, "Simplifying instructions... break complex tasks... smaller steps (chunk method)... visual schedule... improved focus and independence." These practices show intentional scaffolding: tasks are broken down, routines are made visible, and learners engage through multimodal supports that allow them to build understanding and self-regulation through guided participation. This matches the constructivist, which emphasizes that inclusion is supported when teachers mediate learning through scaffolds, differentiated tasks, and structured interaction, rather than relying on uniform instruction. Pog's mention of UDL and multisensory supports also connects to behavior-support, where predictable routines, visual schedules, and reinforcement systems reduce anxiety and support engagement, particularly for learners with behavioral and attention challenges (Rose and Dalton, 2021; Sieber, 2020). In this sense, POG's pedagogy is both constructivist and regulation-oriented: the goal is not only academic learning but the conditions that make learning participation possible.

Alongside these practices, Pog identifies persistent barriers that mirror the structural constraints described in Philippine SNED research. They noted, "Managing behavior... short attention spans... communication difficulties... balancing administrative tasks with teaching," which highlights the dual pressure of instructional work and bureaucratic demands. They also reported, "Procuring materials was difficult because of the outdated DepEd list," pointing to procurement and resource alignment issues that limit access to appropriate instructional materials. These experiences echo that resource constraints, policy-to-practice gaps, and limited support structures that force teachers to improvise and carry additional burdens beyond teaching itself (Macabenta et al., 2023; Abina et al., 2022). Under self-efficacy theory, resource scarcity and administrative load can reduce teachers' perceived capacity to implement their preferred strategies consistently, not because they do not know what to do, but because the environment restricts what is feasible. This is also where training and systemic support become critical, aligning with Tuvida's (2023) recommendation for sustained assistance and capacity-building, especially for managing behavioral issues.

Pog's narrative also shows how collaboration functions as a practical mechanism for sustaining inclusive practice, not as an abstract ideal. They described, "Regular coordination... provide guidance on accommodations... behavior strategies... joint planning," indicating active coaching and shared planning with general education teachers. They also highlighted parent engagement as continuity work: "Regularly update... hoping to continue in their home... Building trust... strengthen home-school partnership." These responses align with the emphasis on stakeholder involvement in behavior management and continuity of learning, particularly when home reinforcement and school-based strategies need to be aligned (Tuvida, 2023). From a self-efficacy perspective, collaboration can strengthen efficacy through social persuasion and shared problem-solving, while also reducing isolation and distributing responsibility across stakeholders. It also provides the kind of job resources that burnout suggests are necessary to buffer high job demands in SNED settings, supporting teacher retention and sustained engagement (Downey and Ambrose, 2024).

Pog's significant experiences depict a teacher operating in a high-demand environment where unpredictability, documentation, behavior support, and material constraints are constant, yet where purposeful meaning is sustained through observable inclusion and independence milestones. Constructivist theory helps explain the logic of Pog's scaffolding approach: learning is built through structured routines, visible supports, chunked tasks, and multisensory access that allow students to actively construct participation and competence. Self-efficacy theory clarifies why witnessing students move toward independent participation can strengthen persistence, while procurement barriers and administrative load can undermine control over implementation, making collaborative planning with teachers and trust-based parent partnerships essential supports for effective and sustainable practice.

Significant Experiences of Celyn

Table 1d: Significant Experiences of Celyn

<i>"Preparing individualized lessons... structured and differentiated activities... documenting progress... collaborating with parents and teachers."</i>
<i>"Helping a learner... struggled with communication... gradually express themselves... gaining confidence and independence."</i>
<i>"Individualized instruction, visual aids, hands-on activities... positive reinforcement."</i>
<i>"Visual schedules work best, while long instructions can overwhelm learners."</i>
<i>"Meeting diverse learning needs and managing behaviors... time-consuming paperwork... coordinating with parents... administrative tasks."</i>
<i>"Stressful and time-consuming... affecting energy and focus... staying organized and reflecting... maintain... well-being."</i>
<i>"Administrators... provide guidance, resources, and feedback... help me improve my teaching."</i>
<i>"Sharing strategies, co-planning... regular communication with parents... reinforces learning at home."</i>

Celyn’s experiences depict special education teaching as a cycle of individualized planning, responsive instruction, and constant documentation that is sustained through collaboration. The teacher described the daily work as “Preparing individualized lessons... structured and differentiated activities... documenting progress... collaborating with parents and teachers.” This statement positions SNED teaching as systematic and IEP-driven, where instruction is inseparable from progress monitoring and coordination. It reflects the role overload, in which teachers assume multiple functions, including instruction, case documentation, and family liaison work, often under time pressure and limited resources (Macabenta et al., 2023; Abina et al., 2022). In self-efficacy terms, the presence of a structured routine, such as IEP-based planning and documentation, can stabilize the teacher’s sense of control because it provides clear goals, observable indicators of progress, and an organized way to interpret student growth even when day-to-day performance fluctuates.

Celyn also frames meaning in teaching through visible communication gains that lead to student confidence and independence. The teacher shared, “Helping a learner... struggled with communication... gradually express themselves... gaining confidence and independence.” This excerpt highlights a key feature of SNED progress: improvement is often gradual and relational, and “express themselves” implies changes not only in skill but also in participation and identity. Under self-efficacy theory, observing such learner development functions as mastery evidence that the teacher’s strategies are effective, which strengthens efficacy beliefs and promotes persistence. Teacher self-efficacy predicts willingness to continue differentiated strategies and buffers stress, especially in demanding roles where results may be slow but meaningful when they occur. It also helps explain why teachers can remain committed even amid heavy paperwork and behavior demands, because student growth serves as a reinforcing outcome that sustains professional motivation and coping.

Celyn’s instructional practices show strong alignment with constructivist principles, especially through multimodal learning and scaffolded access. They emphasized, “Individualized instruction, visual aids, hands-on activities... positive reinforcement,” and added a practical observation about cognitive load: “Visual schedules work best, while long instructions can overwhelm learners.” These responses signal that learning is constructed through active engagement and mediated supports rather than through passive listening. Visual schedules and hands-on activities act as scaffolds that externalize sequence, reduce working-memory demands, and allow learners to participate in tasks with increasing independence. This fits the constructivist highlighting the importance of scaffolding, differentiated instruction, and mediated learning for inclusion, while also acknowledging that effective implementation depends on time, training, and materials. It also resonates with behavior support, where structured routines and visual supports are recommended to reduce anxiety and improve engagement and self-regulation (Rose and Dalton, 2021; Sieber, 2020). In Celyn’s case, visuals and hands-on methods are not presented as add-ons but as core conditions for meaningful participation.

At the same time, Celyn’s narrative makes the workload and administrative burden explicit, linking it directly to stress and reduced attentional capacity. They stated, “Meeting diverse learning needs and managing behaviors... time-consuming paperwork... coordinating with parents... administrative tasks,” and summarized the impact as “Stressful and time-consuming... affecting energy and focus.” This is consistent with results showing that SNED teachers report heavy caseloads, role overload, and administrative demands that contribute to emotional labor and risk of burnout (Downey and Ambrose, 2024; Şanal, 2023; Abina et al., 2022). From a self-efficacy perspective, persistent overload can undermine efficacy indirectly by increasing fatigue and lowering perceived capacity to sustain high-quality differentiation and behavior support. When the teacher’s “energy and focus”

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are depleted, even effective strategies become harder to implement consistently, which can create a cycle where workload reduces performance conditions, and reduced performance conditions threaten confidence and wellbeing.

Celyn's coping and support systems are therefore central to sustaining practice. The teacher described using organization and reflection as self-management: "staying organized and reflecting... maintain... well-being." This is significant because it shows the teacher actively regulating their own professional functioning, which is a key ingredient in sustained efficacy under demanding conditions. They also described enabling supports from leaders and colleagues: "Administrators... provide guidance, resources, and feedback... help me improve my teaching," and, importantly, the practical mechanism of shared work: "Sharing strategies, co-planning... regular communication with parents... reinforces learning at home." These statements echo the importance of administrative support and professional development for retention and for building competence in handling behavioral and instructional complexity (Tuvida, 2023; Downey and Ambrose, 2024). Under self-efficacy theory, such support can strengthen efficacy through social persuasion and through improved performance conditions, because guidance, resources, and feedback make effective practice more feasible. From a constructivist standpoint, co-planning and parent communication also extend the learning environment beyond the classroom, increasing continuity of scaffolds and routines across settings, which is essential for learners whose progress depends on repeated practice and consistent expectations.

Celyn's significant experiences present a teacher whose practice is grounded in structured individualized planning and constructivist-aligned strategies that reduce verbal overload and promote active engagement through visuals and hands-on learning. Their sense of professional meaning is reinforced by gradual but observable student communication gains that build independence. At the same time, the narrative shows that workload and paperwork are not peripheral issues but direct constraints that affect energy, focus, and sustained implementation. Constructivist theory clarifies why Celyn prioritizes multimodal supports and structured visual sequencing as pathways for learners to construct understanding and participation. Self-efficacy theory explains how learner progress, reflective organization, and supportive feedback from administrators and collaborators can strengthen persistence, while high administrative load and constant demands risk draining the psychological resources needed to sustain effective inclusive practice.

Significant Experiences of Lovely

Table 1e: Significant Experiences of Lovely

<i>"Most of learners are ASD... level 3... my patience and physical body was tested everyday."</i>
<i>"Learner... can't speak... roaming... now... in regular class... very talkative... I'm very proud."</i>
<i>"Apply my ABA training... positive reinforcement, task analysis, modeling, consistent routines."</i>
<i>"Breaking tasks into smaller... steps... lecture-style... ineffective... need active and individualized learning."</i>
<i>"Managing behavioral needs... maintaining engagement... wide range of abilities... extensive paperwork... documentation requirements."</i>
<i>"Physical therapy... back muscle contractions... carrying learners during meltdowns... toenail surgery... hazard pay."</i>
<i>"Conduct annual training for regular teachers... anecdotal records... meetings every quarter."</i>
<i>"Open communication... support... resource limitations... regular communication with parents... ensure consistency."</i>

Lovely's narrative positions special education teaching in a high-support context as both physically demanding and emotionally sustaining, with daily work framed as endurance alongside long-horizon learner growth. The teacher described their setting bluntly: "Most of learners are ASD... level 3... my patience and physical body was tested everyday." This statement foregrounds how teaching students with high support needs requires continuous regulation support, crisis responsiveness, and physical effort, not only instructional skill. It aligns with the claims describing SNED as emotionally and physically taxing work shaped by heavy demands, limited resources, and insufficient specialized supports, all of which can elevate burnout risk (Macabenta et al., 2023; Abina et al., 2022; Şanal, 2023). In self-efficacy terms, the phrase "tested everyday" signals that sustaining belief in one's effectiveness is a recurring challenge in a setting where behavior intensity and care demands may not decrease quickly, and where "success" may require prolonged investment.

Yet Lovely's account also provides a strong example of how mastery experiences can build and protect teacher self-efficacy. The teacher shared a transformation narrative: "Learner... can't speak... roaming... now... in regular class... very talkative... I'm very proud." This excerpt highlights long-term change that is functional and socially meaningful, moving from limited communication

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and dysregulated mobility to successful participation in a regular class. Under self-efficacy theory, such outcomes are high-impact mastery evidence because they confirm that sustained instructional and behavioral supports can produce substantial developmental gains. The teacher's emotional stance, "I'm very proud," suggests that learner progress is not only an indicator of student success but also a psychological reinforcement that supports professional persistence. This is consistent with the idea that higher self-efficacy is linked to resilience, continued use of differentiated strategies, and reduced attrition risk, especially in demanding roles (and aligns with concerns about attrition and retention raised by Downey and Ambrose, 2024).

Lovely's instructional descriptions integrate behavioral intervention tools with constructivist-aligned task scaffolding, showing how learning is made possible through structure, modeling, and active engagement rather than lecture. The teacher noted, "Apply my ABA training... positive reinforcement, task analysis, modeling, consistent routines," and reinforced the pedagogical rationale: "Breaking tasks into smaller... steps... lecture-style... ineffective... need active and individualized learning." Although ABA is often categorized under behavioral approaches, what stands out here is how Lovely translates it into classroom learning design that resembles constructivist scaffolding: learners are guided through smaller steps, supported by modeling, and given routines that stabilize participation so they can engage actively with tasks. This aligns with the constructivist emphasizing that scaffolding and differentiated instruction support inclusive outcomes, especially when teachers mediate learning through structured interaction rather than uniform delivery. It also connects to the behavior-support, which emphasizes predictable routines, clear expectations, and reinforcement as conditions that reduce anxiety and support engagement for learners with behavioral challenges (Rose and Dalton, 2021; Sieber, 2020; Sibley et al., 2022). In short, Lovely's practice shows a pragmatic synthesis: behavior-informed structure creates the access conditions, and active individualized learning supports meaning-making within those conditions.

At the same time, Lovely's lived experience shows how instructional work is constrained by administrative load and the complexity of behavioral management. The teacher reported, "Managing behavioral needs... maintaining engagement... wide range of abilities... extensive paperwork... documentation requirements." This reflects the dual burden repeatedly documented in Philippine studies: teachers must deliver highly differentiated instruction while also meeting heavy documentation expectations, often without adequate staffing or materials (Macabenta et al., 2023; Abina et al., 2022). Under self-efficacy theory, administrative overload can weaken efficacy by reducing time and cognitive resources for instruction, even when the teacher has strong skills. It can also increase the likelihood that teachers interpret fatigue as inability, particularly when paperwork competes with direct teaching and support. These patterns are consistent with the burnout and coping, where high job demands with limited job resources elevate stress risk and intensify emotional labor.

Lovely's account adds an important dimension that is sometimes underreported in SNED research: work-related injury and bodily cost. The teacher stated, "Physical therapy... back muscle contractions... carrying learners during meltdowns... toenail surgery... hazard pay." This indicates that the hazards of crisis handling are not abstract; they can result in injury, medical treatment, and long-term physical consequences. In self-efficacy terms, such physical strain can also shape efficacy through physiological and affective states, where pain and injury may affect confidence and perceived capacity to continue, even if instructional competence remains high. It reinforces that SNED teachers face elevated burnout risk because demands are not only cognitive and emotional but can also be physical, and interventions may need to address practical supports and workplace safety alongside psychological coping strategies.

Finally, Lovely's narrative shows that inclusion is not treated as an individual teacher task, but as a system that requires capacity-building and home-school consistency, even when resources are constrained. The teacher described institutional strategies: "Conduct annual training for regular teachers... anecdotal records... meetings every quarter," suggesting that they contribute to inclusion by training general education colleagues and monitoring progress through shared documentation and periodic review. They also emphasized continuity with families: "Open communication... support... resource limitations... regular communication with parents... ensure consistency." This aligns with Tuvida's (2023) emphasis on involving parents and school officials in managing student behavior and supporting teacher effectiveness, and policy-to-practice gaps often appear as weak collaboration and limited resources. From a self-efficacy lens, training others and creating monitoring systems can be interpreted as agency-building: the teacher expands the support network so responsibility is distributed, which can strengthen efficacy by improving performance conditions. From a constructivist standpoint, these collaborations extend the learner's environment so routines, expectations, and supports remain stable across contexts, supporting the learner's construction of skills through repeated, consistent practice.

Lovely's significant experiences portray special education teaching as sustained high-demand work where efficacy is continuously challenged by intensive behavioral needs, documentation overload, resource limits, and physical risk. Constructivist theory helps explain why Lovely rejects "lecture-style" teaching and instead relies on stepwise, active, individualized learning

supported by scaffolds such as modeling and structured routines. Self-efficacy theory clarifies how long-term transformation outcomes, such as a previously non-speaking learner becoming “very talkative” in a regular class, can provide powerful mastery experiences that sustain pride and persistence, while ongoing stressors and injuries can undermine efficacy if system supports remain insufficient.

Glecy’s account situates SNED teaching within a demanding daily rhythm where time, travel, and classroom intensity shape the lived experience of the work. The teacher described a long and extended day: “Leave... 5:30 am... prep... Some days... peaceful... other days, challenging... arrive... 5:30 or 6pm.” This routine reflects workload and time pressure as part of the teaching role, not separate from it. Such pressure interacts with resource constraints and role overload, amplifying stress and fatigue while teachers still need to deliver individualized, behavior-responsive instruction (Macabenta et al., 2023; Abina et al., 2022). From a self-efficacy perspective, prolonged workdays can affect efficacy indirectly through physiological and affective states: fatigue and depleted attention can reduce perceived capacity to sustain patience and instructional consistency, even when competence is present. This aligns with the burnout, where high demands with limited resources heighten risk for stress and attrition (Downey and Ambrose, 2024).

Despite these demands, Glecy frames teaching as both “Fulfilling and challenging,” with professional meaning tied to students’ progress and transitions. The teacher emphasized, “Fulfilling and challenging... see progress... transfer to regular school... still remember you.” This excerpt shows that success is defined not only by immediate learning outcomes but by longer-term inclusion markers, such as transition into regular schooling and sustained relational impact (“still remember you”). Under self-efficacy theory, these outcomes function as mastery experiences and social validation: the teacher sees evidence that their work contributes to durable student development and participation in broader school contexts. Self-efficacy supports persistence and coping, and it also resonates with retention that highlights how meaning and perceived impact can buffer attrition pressures, even when workload remains heavy (Downey and Ambrose, 2024).

Significant Experiences of Glecy

Table 1f: Significant Experiences of Glecy

<i>"Leave... 5:30 am... prep... Some days... peaceful... other days, challenging... arrive... 5:30 or 6pm."</i>
<i>"Fulfilling and challenging... see progress... transfer to regular school... still remember you."</i>
<i>"Hands-on activity, pretend play... manipulatives."</i>
<i>"Get to know your learners... one tool... several ways... behavior... use an alternative suited for the situation."</i>
<i>"Mostly it's the behavior... really challenging to manage."</i>
<i>"Challenges... tools for learning—a chance to change strategy..."</i>
<i>"Parents... very cooperative and supportive... parents working together..."</i>
<i>"The experience so far is satisfactory, since I have just started working."</i>

Glecy’s instructional approach is explicitly constructivist in its emphasis on active, hands-on engagement and play-mediated learning. The teacher stated, “Hands-on activity, pretend play... manipulatives.” This indicates a learning environment where students construct understanding through concrete experiences, symbolic play, and interaction with materials rather than through passive reception. Such practices align with constructivist principles where scaffolding, mediated learning, and differentiated tasks support inclusion. Pretend play and manipulatives also function as scaffolds for communication, social participation, and self-regulation, especially for learners who may struggle with purely verbal instruction. In low-resource contexts, constructivist practice often depends on teacher creativity and access to materials; Glecy’s focus on hands-on tools can be read as both a pedagogical preference and an adaptive response consistent with the insights that teachers improvise and tailor strategies in constrained environments.

A second constructivist theme in Glecy’s account is responsiveness to the learner and situational demands, rather than rigid adherence to a single method. The teacher advised, “Get to know your learners... one tool... several ways... behavior... use an alternative suited for the situation.” This reflects differentiated instruction as situated decision-making: the teacher uses knowledge of the learner to select tools, adjust strategies, and respond to behavior as it emerges. Constructivist theory supports

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this framing because learning is not assumed to be uniform across students; rather, teachers mediate learning by matching supports to the learner's current needs and context. At the same time, the statement recognizes that behavior is a central variable shaping what instruction is possible in the moment, which is consistent with the behavioral issues require competence, design, and monitoring, and that teachers often need further training and support to manage behavior effectively (Tuvida, 2023; Mitchell, 2024).

Glecy is also direct about behavior as the primary challenge: "Mostly it's the behavior... really challenging to manage." This confirms that behavioral and regulation needs can dominate classroom realities and can become a major source of stress, especially where training, interdisciplinary teams, and material supports are limited (Şanal, 2023; Macabenta et al., 2023; Abina et al., 2022). Under self-efficacy theory, repeated exposure to difficult behavior can threaten efficacy by reducing perceived control over outcomes, particularly when progress is inconsistent. However, Glecy also demonstrates a protective cognitive stance that supports efficacy maintenance: "Challenges... tools for learning—a chance to change strategy..." This reframing treats setbacks as information rather than failure. In self-efficacy terms, it reflects adaptive attribution and problem-focused coping, which links to higher efficacy and greater resilience under stress. It also fits with constructivist thinking because the teacher is treating instruction as iterative: challenges provide feedback that guides the next scaffold or alternative tool.

Finally, Glecy's narrative highlights stakeholder support as a practical resource that can buffer the demands of behavior management and long workdays. The teacher reported, "Parents... very cooperative and supportive... parents working together..." This aligns with Tuvida's (2023) emphasis on involving parents and school officials in behavior management and learner support. Strong parent cooperation can improve consistency of routines and expectations across home and school, which supports both learning and behavior regulation. Glecy also noted, "The experience so far is satisfactory, since I have just started working," suggesting early-stage adjustment where perceptions of satisfaction may be shaped by initial support conditions and expectations. From a self-efficacy perspective, early positive experiences and supportive parent partnerships provide social persuasion and early mastery cues that can strengthen efficacy beliefs as the teacher builds experience. Given insights into attrition risk when teachers face high workloads with insufficient support (Downey and Ambrose, 2024), these early supportive conditions may be particularly important for sustaining commitment over time.

Glecy's significant experiences reflect a teacher managing long days and behavior-intensive realities while sustaining meaning through student progress and inclusion transitions. Constructivist theory helps interpret Glecy's reliance on hands-on activities, pretend play, manipulatives, and strategy flexibility as ways to mediate learning through active engagement and adaptive scaffolding. Self-efficacy theory clarifies how seeing students "transfer to regular school" and being remembered strengthens belief in impact, while reframing "challenges" as feedback supports persistence amid difficult behavior management. The account also shows how parent cooperation and emerging administrative collaboration can function as key supports that make inclusive practice more sustainable in resource-constrained contexts.

Collective Analysis of the Significant Experiences of the SNED Teachers

Across the seven participants, SNED teaching is experienced as sustained adaptive work rather than a stable routine of lesson delivery. What they describe is a job where instruction, behavior support, documentation, coordination, and emotional labor occur in parallel, often within the same hour. Even when teachers talk about "teaching," their accounts quickly broaden into the realities that make teaching possible: keeping learners regulated enough to participate, maintaining safety during escalations, preparing individualized materials, documenting IEP-related progress, and coordinating expectations with parents, general education teachers, and administrators. As a collective, the participants portray SNED practice as an "always-on" mode of professional functioning where the boundaries between teacher, case manager, counselor, and crisis responder repeatedly blur.

A shared core experience is learner variability, especially in regulation, attention, communication, and readiness. The teachers frame lesson success as contingent on a learner's day-to-day state, which requires constant recalibration of pacing, task length, modality, and support intensity. Across narratives, effective instruction is described through concrete strategies: using realia and pictures, visual schedules, breaking tasks into smaller steps, multisensory activities, and predictable routines. Importantly, these are not presented as "extra" strategies but as the default means of making participation possible. The common thread is that teachers do not expect uniform engagement; instead, they expect variability and design around it, with scaffolding and routine as their most reliable tools.

Behavior management is consistently positioned as a primary determinant of the teaching experience, not merely a classroom management issue. Several participants describe direct exposure to aggression and unpredictable escalation, and at least one account includes trauma-related language such as anxiety triggered by unpredictability. This introduces a distinctive feature of SNED teaching: teachers are often asked to maintain instructional goals while simultaneously managing safety risks. In these

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contexts, “authority” and structure take on a protective function. Some participants explicitly acknowledge that they become more directive than they would prefer, not because they reject learner-centered instruction, but because a structured stance is sometimes the only way to restore predictability and reduce escalation. The collective picture is that classroom safety and regulation are gateway conditions for learning, and teachers experience it as their responsibility to establish those conditions even when supports are limited.

Workload density and administrative requirements are another cross-cutting experience. Multiple accounts describe the day as survival-like, with heavy cognitive load and limited recovery time. Teachers report juggling preparation of instructional materials, one-on-one or small-group instruction, behavior management, IEP monitoring, and documentation. This is not simply “busy”; it is work that competes with itself. Time spent meeting documentation requirements reduces time for instructional design and reflective adjustment, yet teachers still feel accountable for student outcomes and classroom stability. In the language of the Job Demands–Resources framework, their narratives reflect high job demands (behavior intensity, role overload, paperwork, emotional labor) that frequently exceed available job resources (time protection, staffing, specialist support, materials), creating predictable strain and burnout risk (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Collaboration appears as the main factor that shifts SNED teaching from isolating problem-solving to supported professional practice. When administrators are described as responsive, open, and willing to learn about SNED, teachers report feeling legitimized and less alone. Administrative support functions in two ways: it provides practical help (time, guidance, backing for inclusion decisions) and it provides social validation that the work is valued. In contrast, when general education buy-in is inconsistent, teachers describe having to “beg” for support or encountering weak implementation of accommodations, which effectively returns coordination work back to the SNED teacher. Parent collaboration is described with the same duality: strong follow-through supports continuity and skill generalization, while limited follow-through forces teachers to rebuild routines and reteach steps, slowing progress and increasing workload. Across accounts, collaboration is not framed as a pleasant add-on; it is framed as an implementation condition that determines whether interventions travel across settings or collapse back into school-only effort.

Structural constraints, especially therapy access and cost, are repeatedly described as participation barriers. Teachers note that progress and continuity often depend on services that many families cannot afford or access consistently. This creates a pattern where schools become the primary site of intervention, and teachers feel the pressure to compensate for gaps they did not create and cannot fully control. The consequences are both instructional and emotional: teachers must intensify in-class scaffolding and behavior supports, while also carrying the frustration of seeing what learners need but knowing that external supports may remain out of reach. This also feeds back into collaboration strain, because limited access can weaken the consistency of routines across home, school, and therapy contexts.

Despite these pressures, the narratives share a strong meaning structure that sustains teachers’ persistence. Across participants, the “reward” of SNED teaching is repeatedly located in incremental gains: a learner sitting longer, participating more independently, communicating more effectively, transitioning into inclusion experiences, or achieving small routine milestones. These gains are slow and sometimes measured in minutes, but teachers treat them as substantive evidence that their work matters. This aligns with self-efficacy theory: repeated mastery experiences, even small ones, are the most powerful source of efficacy beliefs and can sustain effort and coping under difficult conditions (Bandura, 1997). In practical terms, the participants’ stories suggest that teachers remain committed not because the job becomes easier, but because they can see concrete change in learners over time, and those observations help them reinterpret hardship as purposeful work.

Taken together, the seven participants describe SNED teaching as a balancing act between instructional responsiveness and system constraint. Their collective experience suggests that inclusive education success depends on more than teacher skill; it depends on whether schools reduce avoidable workload friction, stabilize collaboration routines, provide credible behavior support structures, and protect teachers’ ability to experience and document progress. The narratives also show that teachers already carry a sophisticated set of coping and instructional strategies. The central issue is not whether teachers know what to do; it is whether the environment gives them enough time, support, and shared responsibility to do it consistently.

SOP 2: What challenges do Special Education teachers encounter in teaching students with special needs inside and outside the classroom?

Special Needs Education (SNED) teachers encounter a distinct set of challenges in teaching learners with special needs that extend beyond classroom instruction and into behavior support, planning, documentation, and coordination across contexts.

Table 2. Themes emerged from the experiences of the SPED Teachers as to the challenges encountered in managing students with special needs inside and outside the classroom

Clustered Codes	Theme	Subtheme	Description of the Theme
Managing aggression and ensuring safety; Behavior as primary classroom challenge; Behavior/attention demands plus admin load	Triumphs through teaching	High-intensity behavior management	This theme captures how SPED teachers' professional experiences are defined by making instruction work despite persistent, high-stakes constraints. In this theme, "triumph" does not mean the absence of problems. It refers to teachers' capacity to keep teaching possible and meaningful under conditions that repeatedly disrupt instructional flow, dilute intervention continuity, and shift additional responsibilities back onto the teacher.
Dual burden: instruction and paperwork; High-demand classroom plus documentation overload		Workload and documentation pressure	
Parent communication barrier; Uneven home carryover of interventions		Home-school coordination gaps	
Therapy cost as participation barrier		Financial barriers to support services	

Theme 1: Triumphs through teaching

This theme captures SNED teachers' lived experience of sustaining instruction and learner progress in an environment where multiple constraints operate simultaneously and repeatedly reshape what teaching can look like on any given day. The theme integrates the 4 sub-themes of high-intensity behavior management, workload and documentation pressure, home-school coordination gaps, and financial barriers to support services, not as separate problems but as interacting conditions that compound instructional complexity. In this context, triumph is not defined by smooth lessons or ideal implementation, but by teachers' capacity to preserve learning opportunities amid disruption, maintain continuity when routines are fragile, and keep individualized goals visible despite competing demands.

Across participant experiences, teaching is shown as a continuous process of rebuilding the conditions for learning. Teachers act as stabilizers of classroom functioning, planners of individualized pathways, and coordinators of support systems that extend beyond the classroom. Because the constraints are interdependent, progress often depends on how effectively teachers can align routines, manage time and documentation requirements, and sustain communication and supports across contexts. This makes teaching success more accurately reflected in small, cumulative gains and maintained participation rather than in quick outcomes.

Subtheme 1: High-intensity behavior management

When things got intense, keeping control became key. Classrooms often faced sudden outbursts - hitting, yelling, long stretches of chaos - that had to be calmed before teaching could go on. Safety came first, always. Teachers didn't talk about rare slip-ups; they spoke of daily struggles, moments that came without warning. Their job changed because of it. Lessons bent around calming crises instead of sticking to plans. Attention never wavered - one eye stayed on danger, even during math or reading. The rhythm of the day revolved around preventing flare-ups, not just guiding growth.

Subtheme 2: Workload and documentation pressure

Workload and documentation pressure emerged as a pervasive constraint because participants described SNED teaching as a "dual burden" where high-support instruction is continuously paired with paperwork, reporting, and administrative obligations. Across their accounts, documentation was not framed as a neutral requirement but as a competing demand that fragments planning time, reduces opportunities for observation and instructional adjustment, and weakens the continuity needed to sustain

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individualized goals. In effect, teachers experienced paperwork as displacing the very conditions that responsive SNED instruction requires: time to monitor learner progress closely, refine scaffolds, and follow through on differentiated routines with fidelity.

Subtheme 3: Home-school coordination gaps

Home-school coordination gaps emerged as a recurring challenge because the effectiveness of classroom-based interventions depended on continuity beyond school, yet participants described uneven communication with families and inconsistent follow-through at home. In their accounts, teachers could establish routines and strategies in class, but progress weakened when caregiver coordination did not translate into sustained practice at home. This discontinuity fragmented expectations across settings, slowed skill generalization, and added strain because teachers had to repeatedly rebuild routines and compensate for gaps that were outside their direct control.

Subtheme 4: Financial barriers to support services

Financial barriers to support services emerged as a distinct constraint because participants described therapy access as a practical “gatekeeper” that shapes how much intervention a learner can receive beyond what schools can provide. In the accounts, therapies are positioned as part of the learner’s broader support ecosystem, complementing school-based instruction through specialized, sustained skill-building. When families cannot afford these services, intervention intensity outside school decreases, follow-through becomes harder to sustain, and teachers are left to carry a larger share of skill development within classroom limits of time, staffing, and competing responsibilities.

SOP 3: How does collaboration with school administrators, general education teachers, parents, and other professionals influence Special Needs Education (SNED) teachers’ instructional practices, professional identity, and overall teaching experiences in supporting students with special needs?

Collaboration with various stakeholders plays a decisive role in shaping how Special Education (SNED) teachers plan, deliver, and sustain instruction for learners with special needs. Because inclusive and SNED interventions depend on shared routines, consistent accommodations, and coordinated follow-through across settings, teachers’ instructional practices are closely tied to the quality of collaboration they experience with administrators, general education teachers, parents, and allied professionals.

Table 3: Themes emerged from Special Education teachers’ collaboration experiences with various stakeholders and how it influences Special Education teachers’ instructional practices, professional identity, and overall teaching experience

Clustered Codes	Theme	Subtheme	Description of the Theme
Supportive administrator guidance; Early-stage administrator collaboration; Administrator endorsement enables inclusion	Collaboration with education community	Administrative partnership as enabling support	This theme refers to how SPED teachers’ practice is shaped by their working relationships with key stakeholders in the school and surrounding support network. The major theme captures collaboration as a practical system that can either enable or constrain inclusive education, influencing how instruction is planned, how interventions are carried out across settings, and how teachers experience their professional role.
General education teacher collaboration for inclusion; Gen-ed buy-in variability; Capacity-building/monitoring for inclusion		General education coordination for inclusion	
Strong parent cooperation; Regular parent updates for continuity; Parent non-collaboration/low follow-through		Parent partnership and continuity work	
Therapy access constraints affect collaboration		Interprofessional support constrained by access barriers	
IEP-based planning and documentation routine; General education teacher collaboration for inclusion; Capacity-building/monitoring for inclusion		Collaborative planning shapes differentiated instruction	
Regular parent updates for continuity; Strong parent cooperation; Parent non-collaboration/low follow-through; Uneven home carryover of interventions		Home-school alignment strengthens or weakens intervention fidelity	
Supportive administrator guidance; Administrator endorsement enables inclusion; Early-stage administrator collaboration		Administrative backing strengthens professional identity and morale	
Gen-ed buy-in variability; Therapy access constraints affect collaboration; Therapy cost as participation barrier		System constraints mediate collaboration quality and raise coordination load	

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Theme 2: Collaboration with the education community

This major theme shows that SNED teaching is not enacted in isolation but is continuously negotiated through collaboration with the wider education community. It encompasses multiple, overlapping collaboration processes that jointly determine the feasibility, consistency, and perceived sustainability of inclusive practice. Within this theme, the 8 sub-themes include administrative partnership as enabling support, general education coordination for inclusion, parent partnership and continuity work, interprofessional support constrained by access barriers, collaborative planning shaping differentiated instruction, home-school alignment strengthening or weakening intervention fidelity, administrative backing strengthening professional identity and morale, and system constraints mediating collaboration quality and raising coordination load.

Subtheme 5. Administrative partnership as enabling support

Administrative partnership emerged as an enabling condition because participants described school leadership as shaping what is feasible in inclusion and SNED through decision-making, daily visibility, and the provision of practical supports. Administrators were portrayed not only as approvers of plans but as co-problem-solvers whose guidance and presence can reduce uncertainty and stabilize inclusive routines.

Subtheme 6. General education coordination for inclusion

General education coordination emerged as necessary because inclusion is enacted in shared classrooms where accommodations and expectations must be carried by more than one teacher. Participants described coordination as productive when receiving teachers are receptive and share responsibility, but unstable when understanding and capacity vary across colleagues.

Subtheme 7. Parent partnership and continuity work

Parent partnership and continuity work emerged because participants treated parent engagement as the bridge between school-based intervention and durable change. Teachers described parent collaboration as sustained work involving updates, guidance, and home programs, with gains strengthening when home routines follow through and collapsing when home implementation is inconsistent.

Subtheme 8. Interprofessional support constrained by access barriers

Interprofessional support constrained by access barriers emerged because participants described therapy and specialist inputs as valuable but often limited by affordability. When external services are inaccessible, the SNED classroom is positioned as the primary intervention site, increasing teacher responsibility for supports that would ideally be distributed across professionals and contexts.

Subtheme 9. Collaborative planning shapes differentiated instruction

Collaborative planning emerged as a mechanism for differentiated instruction because participants described collaboration as the process through which teachers jointly interpret learner needs and translate those interpretations into concrete modifications. Differentiation was framed as shared practice built through feedback, reflection, and strategy exchange, rather than as an individual teacher skill enacted alone.

Subtheme 10. Home-school alignment strengthens or weakens intervention fidelity

Home-school alignment emerged as a fidelity issue because participants differentiated between interventions that remain school-only and those that become stable habits through consistent cues and reinforcement across contexts. Teachers described alignment as fragile when home follow-through is inconsistent, causing routines to weaken and progress to slow.

Subtheme 11. Administrative backing strengthens professional identity and morale

Administrative backing emerged as identity-forming because participants linked leadership support to motivation, reduced emotional burden, increased confidence, and a stronger sense that inclusive work is legitimate professional practice. Support was described as influencing not only what teachers can do, but how they experience themselves as professionals under high demand.

Subtheme 12. System constraints mediate collaboration quality and raise coordination load

System constraints emerged as a mediating condition because participants described collaboration as beneficial yet uneven, with coordination burdens often returning to SNED teachers when class size, training gaps, and resource limitations reduce other stakeholders' capacity to implement supports. In this context, SNED teachers frequently become translators and negotiators to keep inclusion functional.

SOP 4: How do Special Needs Education (SNED) teachers cope with the academic, emotional, and professional demands of teaching students with special needs, including those arising from collaborative responsibilities?

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Special Needs Education (SNED) teachers cope with the academic, emotional, and professional demands of teaching learners with special needs through a combination of structured work routines, sustained persistence, emotional regulation, and meaning-making anchored in learner progress. The discussion that follows examines how teachers organize their work, regulate their responses to daily learner variability, endure cumulative demands, and sustain motivation through incremental gains, including pressures that arise from collaborative responsibilities.

Table 4: Themes emerged on how Special Education teachers cope with the academic, emotional, and professional demands of teaching students with special needs, including those arising from collaborative responsibilities

Clustered Codes	Themes	Subtheme	Description of the Theme
IEP-based planning and documentation routine; Multiple roles/selves in daily work	Addressing Academic Demands	Structured self-management in multi-role teaching	This refers to how SPED teachers cope with the instructional, emotional, and professional requirements of teaching learners with special needs while maintaining learning continuity and classroom functioning. The major theme captures coping as a set of deliberate practices and interpretations that help teachers manage complex daily responsibilities, sustain engagement in high-support settings, and continue pursuing individualized goals despite workload pressure and learner variability.
Workday framed as survival; Daily endurance in high-support setting; Long commute and variable day intensity		Endurance under sustained demands	
Mood-dependent class engagement; Daily endurance in high-support setting		Emotional regulation and responsiveness to learner variability	
Fulfillment from small goal attainment; Progress measured in small gains; Independence and inclusion milestones; Long-term learner transformation; Meaning from progress and transition; Communication growth builds confidence		Meaning-making through incremental progress	

Theme 3: Addressing Academic Demands

This major theme shows that SNED teachers cope with academic demands by combining practical work-organization strategies with psychological and emotional regulation processes that allow them to continue teaching under sustained strain. It includes 4 sub-themes of structured self-management in multi-role teaching, endurance under sustained demands, emotional regulation and responsiveness to learner variability, and meaning-making through incremental progress. Together, these sub-themes indicate that coping in SNED is not limited to stress reduction; it is an active effort to preserve instructional quality, maintain participation and routine stability, and sustain motivation over time. The theme, therefore, frames coping as both a professional practice and a resilience process, where teachers manage competing roles, persist through high-demand conditions, regulate their responses to daily variability, and anchor their commitment in the value of small but meaningful learner gains.

Subtheme 13. Structured self-management in multi-role teaching

Structured self-management in multi-role teaching captures how participants protected instructional quality by building routines that organize multiple responsibilities into predictable cycles. Rather than viewing planning and documentation as separate from teaching, teachers described these practices as the work that makes individualized instruction feasible, keeps collaborative partners aligned, and stabilizes a workload that would otherwise feel fragmented across competing roles.

Subtheme 14. Endurance under sustained demands

Endurance under sustained demands emphasizes coping as persistence through cumulative strain rather than the elimination of stressors. Participants portrayed the workday as physically, cognitively, and temporally demanding, with effort extending beyond instruction into fatigue management, vigilance, and the capacity to return each day to a high-support setting.

Subtheme 15. Emotional regulation and responsiveness to learner variability

Emotional regulation and responsiveness to learner variability captures coping as moment-to-moment adjustment of both instruction and teacher affect in response to learners' changing readiness, mood, attention, and regulation needs. Participants described teaching as contingent mediation, where maintaining a calm, attuned stance and recalibrating expectations are necessary to keep learning possible under fluctuating classroom conditions.

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Subtheme 16. Meaning-making through incremental progress

Meaning-making through incremental progress captures how participants sustained motivation by interpreting small gains, routine mastery, communication growth, and inclusion transitions as legitimate evidence of impact. Teachers described progress as slow and non-linear, yet professionally sustaining when they could see learners move from supported action to greater independence over time.

SOP 5: What insights can be drawn from the significant experiences of teachers handling learners with special needs?

The significant experiences shared by SNED teachers reveal not only what challenges and coping practices look like in daily work, but also what these experiences mean for how inclusive education is understood and sustained in practice. From these narratives, eight key insights were drawn that synthesize recurring patterns across instruction, collaboration, coping, and teacher wellbeing. These meanings highlight how teaching learners with special needs involves adaptive decision-making under layered constraints, how support systems and continuity across contexts shape progress, and how teachers sustain commitment through structured routines and incremental learner gains. The discussion that follows presents the eight insights as an integrated interpretation of the teachers' lived experiences and what they imply for strengthening inclusive education practice and teacher support.

1. SNED teaching is adaptive systems work, not lesson delivery.

The participants' significant experiences show that instruction is continuously shaped by forces that sit "around" the lesson but determine whether the lesson can occur: regulation states, behavioral escalation, communication barriers, individualized needs, paperwork requirements, and stakeholder coordination. This means the central competence of SNED teachers is not simply content knowledge or routine classroom management. It is the ability to make rapid, high-stakes instructional decisions while simultaneously managing safety, individualized supports, and compliance obligations. Teachers are effectively coordinating a small system: student readiness and triggers, classroom structure and tools, IEP targets and evidence collection, and collaborative links to families and receiving teachers. When the system is stable, teachers can deliver mediated learning and gradual release of responsibility. When the system is unstable, teachers shift into stabilization and recovery modes. The implication for interpretation is that SNED effectiveness must be understood ecologically: what teachers "do" is constrained and enabled by the surrounding system, and teacher practice is best analyzed as a set of adaptive responses to system conditions rather than as a fixed instructional style.

2. Safety and regulation are gateway conditions for learning.

The high-intensity behavior theme makes clear that regulation is not a secondary variable in SNED classrooms. It is the prerequisite that determines time-on-task, continuity of routines, and whether differentiated instruction can be sustained. Participants describe episodes that require immediate de-escalation, protective positioning, and crisis management, which displaces planned instruction and reduces opportunities for scaffolded participation. This reframes inclusive and SNED teaching as contingent instruction: teachers must secure regulation before they can maintain engagement and skill-building. It also changes what "successful teaching" means in high-support contexts. On certain days, success may be defined as preventing harm, restoring calm, and re-engaging a learner into minimal participation rather than completing academic targets. The insight is that any inclusive education program that emphasizes curriculum access without directly strengthening regulation and behavior support capacity will leave teachers vulnerable and will struggle with fidelity, because the enabling condition for instruction is not assured.

3. Documentation is an instructional trade-off with real opportunity costs.

In the participants' experiences, paperwork, reporting, and administrative requirements do not simply add work, they reallocate time and cognitive bandwidth away from the practices that individualized teaching requires. Constructivist and responsive instruction depend on observing learner responses, adjusting prompts, revising scaffolds, and maintaining continuity across sessions. When teacher time is saturated by documentation, these pedagogically essential activities become compressed or postponed, and instruction becomes less consistent. This helps explain why participants link paperwork pressure to reduced consistency and diminished ability to fully meet individualized goals. The broader meaning is that "accountability structures" can unintentionally reduce instructional quality if they are not paired with compensating resources such as protected time, streamlined templates, clerical support, and realistic caseload expectations. In SNED contexts, documentation should function as a tool for instruction, not a competitor to instruction.

4. Home-school continuity is a core mechanism for skill generalization, not an optional enhancement.

The home-school coordination themes highlight that many targeted skills in SNED, particularly regulation routines, functional communication, and independence behaviors, require repeated practice across environments. Teachers describe the difficulty of

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sustaining progress when home routines do not reinforce the same strategies or when communication with parents is constrained. The insight is that discontinuity creates a predictable cycle: skills improve at school, weaken at home, and return to school “reset,” forcing teachers to reteach and rebuild. This cycle increases workload, slows progress, and contributes to emotional strain because teacher effort does not translate into stable gains. The deeper meaning is that inclusion and SNED interventions are ecological by nature: a child’s learning is shaped by the consistency of adult mediation across contexts. Effective programs therefore need to treat parent partnership and home coaching as an instructional extension, not as a peripheral relationship task.

5. Equity constraints reshape the intervention ecology and redistribute responsibility back to teachers and schools.

Financial barriers to therapy and specialist services alter what supports are available to learners, and this changes the intensity and breadth of intervention beyond school. When families cannot access therapy, teachers describe the school becoming the main intervention site, even for needs that would benefit from coordinated multidisciplinary support. The insight is that resource inequity functions as an invisible determinant of educational outcomes: it limits opportunities for structured practice, expert feedback, and consistent generalization, and it increases the burden on teachers to fill gaps they cannot fully fill. This also changes how teacher effectiveness should be interpreted. Slower progress or persistent difficulties are not necessarily indicators of weak teaching. They may reflect a constrained support ecology where necessary services are unavailable. This interpretation supports a more just analysis of teacher work by locating certain limits in structural constraints rather than in individual competence.

6. Collaboration is not a “nice-to-have”; it is the implementation infrastructure for inclusion.

The collaboration themes collectively show that inclusion depends on stable relationships and shared routines among administrators, general education teachers, parents, and specialists. Administrative partnership legitimizes inclusion decisions, protects time, and reduces uncertainty. General education coordination determines whether accommodations are implemented consistently in inclusive classrooms. Parent partnership supports carryover and continuity. Specialist collaboration, when available, expands the intervention toolkit and reduces the degree to which the SNED teacher must operate alone. When these collaborations are strong, teachers report clearer pathways to action, stronger morale, and greater confidence. When they are weak or uneven, the coordination burden returns to the SNED teacher, and inclusion becomes person-dependent rather than system-supported. The core meaning is that collaboration quality determines fidelity. Without collaborative structures, inclusive practices are vulnerable to breakdown, even when teachers are competent and motivated.

7. Coping in SNED is professional work design, not only personal resilience.

The coping themes show that participants cope by constructing routines that stabilize their multi-role work. Structured self-management, such as planning cycles, documentation systems, and predictable routines, functions as an “adult scaffold” that preserves instructional quality under competing demands. Endurance reflects a reality of cumulative strain where coping means persisting through fatigue, long hours, high vigilance, and repeated exposure to challenging behaviors. Emotional regulation and responsiveness show coping as a moment-to-moment professional skill: teachers actively manage their own affect to co-regulate learners and to adjust instruction to variability. The insight is that coping is embedded in practice. It is shaped by workload structures and collaboration conditions. Therefore, interventions that focus only on individual “self-care” without altering routines, role distribution, and support systems will likely have limited impact, because the primary stressors are structural and recurring.

8. Meaning-making through incremental progress sustains motivation and professional identity.

Across participants, the most consistent source of fulfillment is not dramatic transformation but small, measurable gains: increased sitting tolerance, improved communication, greater independence in routines, and successful inclusion participation. These gains function psychologically as evidence that effort produces change, which sustains persistence in high-demand environments. The insight is that SNED teachers maintain commitment because they witness progress that is often invisible to outsiders. They evaluate success through micro-indicators aligned with developmental and functional goals. This meaning-making also supports professional identity: teachers see themselves as builders of capability and independence, even when progress is slow and labor-intensive. For program design, the implication is that schools should institutionalize ways to document and celebrate micro-progress, because doing so supports teacher efficacy and morale while also improving instructional precision through better progress monitoring.

SOP 6: Based on the findings of the study, what inclusion framework may be developed to reflect Special Needs Education (SNED) teachers’ academic demands, collaboration with the education community, and triumphs through teaching?

The researcher was able to propose the ACT Model in addressing the importance of collaboration practices to make inclusive education successful. This ACT model is derived from the three major themes that emerged based on the significant testimonies

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of the seven (7) special education teachers in the City Schools Division of Bacoar City: Addressing Academic Demands, Collaboration with the education community, and Triumphs through teaching.

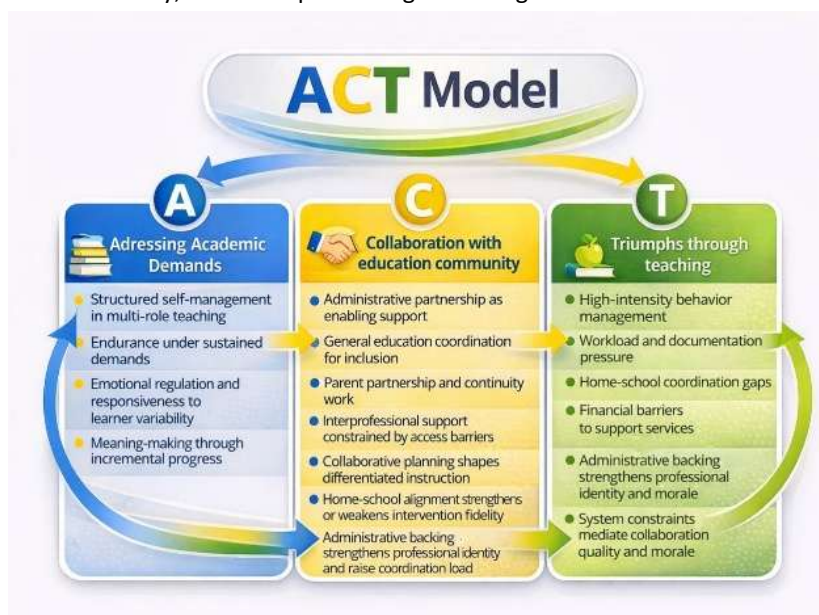


Figure 1. ACT Model of Inclusion

The color scheme is both symbolic and contextual. The use of blue for A (Addressing Academic Demands) and yellow for C (Collaboration with the education community) reflects the official colors of Bacoar, grounding the model within its local educational context and emphasizing that both instructional practices and collaboration are institutionally and community anchored. The blue (A) signifies structure, organization, and stability, which align with the need for systematic planning, documentation, and differentiated instruction. This domain includes sub-themes such as structured self-management in multi-role teaching, endurance under sustained demands, emotional regulation and responsiveness to learner variability, and meaning-making through incremental progress, all of which highlight how teachers organize and sustain their instructional work. The yellow (C) represents connection, partnership, and shared responsibility, emphasizing that inclusive education is a collective effort. Its eight sub-themes including administrative partnership, general education coordination, parent partnership, interprofessional support, collaborative planning, home-school alignment, administrative backing, and system constraints, demonstrate how collaboration shapes both instructional implementation and teachers' professional experiences.

In contrast, the green color for T (Triumphs through teaching) represents SNED education itself, symbolizing growth, development, and resilience. This domain captures the realities and challenges that teachers navigate, including high-intensity behavior management, workload and documentation pressure, home-school coordination gaps, and financial barriers to support services. Green reflects not only the presence of these challenges but also the growth and progress that emerge despite them, reinforcing the idea that teaching in SNED involves continuous adaptation and perseverance.

The arrows connecting A, C, and T illustrate that these domains operate as a cyclical and interdependent system. The movement from A to C indicates that how teachers manage academic demands influences how they engage in collaboration, particularly in planning, communication, and coordination of supports. The flow from C to T shows that the quality of collaboration directly affects how challenges are experienced and addressed, either easing or intensifying teaching conditions. The arrow from T back to A represents feedback, where the realities of teaching and the challenges encountered reshape instructional planning, organization, and strategies.

The diagram conveys that the ACT Model is not linear but cyclical and integrated, where teaching practices, collaboration, and challenges continuously influence one another. Effective inclusive education emerges when structured academic practices (A), strong collaborative systems (C), and responsive handling of challenges (T) are aligned within a supportive and contextually grounded framework.

This chapter presents the summary of findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the study on the experiences of Special Education (SNED) teachers in handling learners with special needs. The chapter also articulates the conclusions derived from these findings, emphasizing how instructional practices, coping mechanisms, and collaboration processes are shaped by both teacher

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agency and systemic conditions. Finally, it offers targeted, programmatic recommendations for stakeholders and future researchers to strengthen inclusive education practices and support the sustainability of SNED teaching.

The following findings were derived from the thematic analysis of the participants' lived experiences and are aligned with the research questions of the study.

1. The findings reveal that the lived experiences of SNED teachers are characterized by continuous adaptive practice that extends beyond instruction into behavior management, individualized planning, documentation, and stakeholder coordination. Teachers described their work as managing diverse learner needs through differentiated strategies such as visual supports, structured routines, and hands-on activities while simultaneously monitoring IEP goals and documenting progress. Their daily experiences reflect the need to balance instructional delivery with emotional responsiveness and administrative responsibilities. Despite these demands, teachers consistently found meaning in their work through observable student improvements in communication, independence, and participation, indicating that teaching is both technically demanding and personally fulfilling.
2. The theme highlighted Triumphs through teaching, which encompasses four key subthemes: high-intensity behavior management, workload and documentation pressure, home-school coordination gaps, and financial barriers to support services. Teachers reported that behavior management often dominates classroom time, requiring immediate attention to safety and de-escalation before instruction can proceed. At the same time, extensive documentation requirements compete with instructional time and reduce consistency in lesson delivery. Challenges are further compounded by inconsistent parent communication and limited home follow-through, which weaken intervention continuity, as well as financial constraints that restrict access to therapy services. These challenges are interconnected and collectively intensify the complexity of SNED teaching, requiring teachers to constantly adjust their practices to maintain instructional continuity.
3. The theme highlighted Collaboration with the education community as a major theme, reflected through eight subthemes: administrative partnership as enabling support, general education coordination for inclusion, parent partnership and continuity work, interprofessional support constrained by access barriers, collaborative planning shaping differentiated instruction, home-school alignment strengthening or weakening intervention fidelity, administrative backing strengthening professional identity and morale, and system constraints mediating collaboration quality and raising coordination load. The results show that collaboration plays a central role in shaping instructional practices, as effective partnerships enable consistent accommodations, shared responsibility, and continuity across settings. At the same time, variability in stakeholder engagement and systemic limitations often increase coordination demands on SNED teachers. Thus, collaboration functions both as a support system and as a structural condition that influences how inclusive education is implemented and experienced.
4. The findings generated eight key meanings that explain how SNED teachers cope with academic, emotional, and professional demands: (1) teaching as structured self-management, where routines and organization help manage multiple roles; (2) coping as endurance under sustained demands, reflecting persistence despite workload and pressure; (3) emotional regulation as part of teaching practice, enabling teachers to respond effectively to learner variability; (4) meaning-making through incremental progress, where small student gains sustain motivation; (5) collaboration as both support and demand, influencing workload and instructional consistency; (6) instruction as adaptive and learner-responsive, requiring continuous modification of strategies; (7) professional identity shaped by relational work with students and stakeholders; and (8) system constraints shaping practice and outcomes, highlighting how external conditions affect teacher effectiveness. These meanings show that coping is both a practical and psychological process that sustains teaching under complex conditions.
5. SNED teaching is shaped by the interaction between teacher agency and systemic conditions. Teachers demonstrate strong adaptive capacity in managing learner needs, organizing instruction, and maintaining engagement despite constraints. However, their effectiveness is closely tied to the availability of support systems, consistency of collaboration, and access to resources. The insights emphasize that meaningful learning outcomes in SNED are often gradual and require sustained coordination across classroom and home contexts. They also highlight that teachers' resilience is anchored not only in skills but in their ability to interpret progress, maintain purpose, and navigate structural challenges.
6. The findings support the need for an integrated and systems-based intervention to address the identified challenges and strengthen inclusive practice. The proposed ACT Model: Addressing Academic Demands, Collaboration with the education community, and Triumphs through teaching, emerges as a relevant framework that aligns with the teachers' experiences. The results suggest that improving SNED practice requires coordinated efforts that enhance instructional organization, strengthen stakeholder collaboration, and support teacher wellbeing. By addressing these interconnected areas, schools can improve the consistency of interventions, reduce workload pressures, and create conditions that enable teachers to sustain effective and meaningful inclusive education practices.

CONCLUSION

The study indicates that Special Education (SNED) teaching is fundamentally an adaptive and context-dependent practice shaped by the interaction between teacher agency and systemic conditions. The insights drawn from the findings show that teachers do not operate within stable or ideal environments; instead, they continuously reorganize their instructional approaches, manage competing responsibilities, and respond to learner variability in real time. This suggests that effective SNED teaching cannot be understood solely in terms of individual competence, but must be viewed as a dynamic process influenced by workload structures, behavioral demands, and the availability of support systems.

The study further concludes that teachers' capacity to sustain instructional quality is closely tied to their ability to establish structured routines and exercise self-management in multi-role teaching contexts. Organization, planning, and documentation are not merely administrative requirements but function as critical tools that stabilize instruction and enable individualized support. At the same time, coping is not characterized by the elimination of stressors but by endurance under sustained demands, where teachers persist despite ongoing pressure, fatigue, and uncertainty. This highlights that resilience in SNED is both a professional necessity and a response to systemic conditions that remain largely unchanged.

Another key conclusion is that emotional regulation and meaning-making are central to sustaining teacher engagement and effectiveness. Teachers actively manage their emotional responses to challenging classroom situations and rely on incremental student progress as a source of motivation and professional fulfillment. Small gains in learner behavior, communication, and independence are not viewed as minor outcomes but as significant indicators of success that reinforce teachers' sense of purpose. This underscores that progress in SNED is cumulative and often non-linear, requiring sustained effort and recognition of gradual change.

The findings also lead to the conclusion that collaboration is a critical but variable factor in inclusive education. While collaboration with administrators, general education teachers, parents, and specialists has the potential to enhance instructional consistency and intervention fidelity, its effectiveness depends on the level of stakeholder engagement, shared responsibility, and access to resources. When collaboration is strong, it distributes workload and supports teacher efficacy; when it is weak or inconsistent, it increases coordination demands and places additional pressure on SNED teachers. This dual nature of collaboration highlights the need for structured and sustained partnership systems within schools.

Finally, the study concludes that systemic constraints, including workload demands, limited access to support services, and uneven stakeholder capacity, significantly shape both teaching practices and learner outcomes. These constraints often limit the full implementation of inclusive education despite teachers' commitment and competence. Therefore, improving SNED practice requires not only strengthening teacher skills but also addressing structural conditions through coordinated programs and support systems. The ACT Model emerges as a relevant response to these conclusions, emphasizing the need to align instructional organization, collaborative practices, and teacher support mechanisms to create more sustainable and effective inclusive education environments.

In light of the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are proposed.

1. School administrators are encouraged to implement a school-based ACT system by formalizing protected weekly time for IEP planning and documentation, establishing biweekly SNED–GenEd co-planning sessions with clear accountability agreements, and adopting standardized templates and safety protocols developed in the program to reduce workload friction and improve instructional consistency.
2. Special Education teachers are encouraged to operationalize structured self-management by consistently using IEP-aligned weekly plans, micro-gains tracking tools, and co-regulation strategies, while integrating reflection routines that document small learner progress to sustain instructional focus and professional motivation.
3. General education teachers are encouraged to apply agreed Inclusion Support Agreements in daily instruction by implementing specific accommodations, participating in scheduled co-planning cycles, and using fidelity checklists to ensure that supports for learners with special needs are consistently enacted across classroom settings.
4. Parents and caregivers are encouraged to follow structured home program guides provided by the school, including simple step-by-step routines aligned with IEP goals, while maintaining regular communication through weekly updates to strengthen home-school continuity and reinforce student learning.
5. Policymakers and education leaders may support program-level implementation by allocating resources for school-based SNED support systems, including simplified documentation policies, access pathways to therapy services, and targeted professional development aligned with behavior management, collaboration, and inclusive instruction.

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6. Future researchers may examine the implementation and outcomes of the ACT Model through intervention-based or longitudinal studies, focusing on measurable indicators such as teacher workload, collaboration fidelity, and student functional progress to validate and refine program effectiveness in diverse SNED contexts.

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