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# Effective Programming and Instruction for Students With Social and Behavioral Needs

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# EFFECTIVE PROGRAMMING AND INSTRUCTION FOR STUDENTS WITH SOCIAL AND BEHAVIORAL NEEDS

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## Abstract

Providing special education services to students with Emotional Behavioral Disorders (EBD) can be especially complex. EBD students often display academic deficits which are compounded by difficult behaviors and result in many students lagging 1-2 grade levels behind their peers. If not addressed adequately, the combined skill and behavioral challenges continue into adulthood and lead to troubling outcomes such as higher rates of unemployment, dysfunctional relationships, and negative encounters with the legal system. Early and consistent effective intervention is critical to benefit EBD students across academic and social-emotional domains to facilitate as much appropriate inclusion as possible. This review examines: the qualities of effective interventions; potential peer impact; the complexity of co-morbidity; and the atmosphere for teachers and the influence of administration and legislation.

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## Chapter I

This Literature Review examines the effectiveness of special education services for students with emotional behavioral disorder (EBD) who are educated with a strictly pull-out approach compared to the growth demonstrated when students receive both pull-out and push-in minutes. Investigating this area stems from the stress and confusion special education teachers experience when confronted with repeated behavioral episodes while teaching students in the general education setting. The special education teacher receives positive feedback from their colleagues following pull-out services. Educators sense the absence of support when special education students are in the mainstream classes without 1:1 teacher support. Anyone serving students with a range of abilities, including those with disabilities, may relate to the following scenario: A student with EBD is triggered during small group math lessons, such that they throw their book at staff when the teacher announces the lesson is on subtraction with borrowing. The teacher emphasizes the lesson will be direct instruction and guided practice only, with no independent work required at this time. The special education student is reminded that a staff member will be present to assist with solving the problems. The reassurance does not prevent materials from being destroyed, swearing, or engaging in other disruptive – possibly aggressive – behaviors. It may be a refusal to comply, even when provided with a timer, a verbal reminder that five minutes remain for math games on the Chrome book, or "First / Then" language to assure the student that additional free time will follow small group. The student tips over the desk when staff approaches to remove the Chrome book. Due to regulation challenges, the student meets individually with the school social worker to learn strategies to behave appropriately, in addition to a skills group once per week. The student talks about time in the skills group as a way to avoid work and claims sarcastically, "I get to see the social worker no matter what 'cause I'm special!"

When a staff returns the student to class, they poke their head into the room and give a thumbs up saying silently, “He did great!” Meanwhile the classroom teacher, instructing other students, is left with no knowledge of *what* the student *did great* or how *great* is being measured – essentially no data at all. Instead, the teacher’s frustration builds and she thinks, “Of course he did great. There was no challenge presented and nothing that resembled typical classroom tasks or expectations. Instead, it was just a fun break. Come spend this time with the student IN the classroom during math and see how smoothly it goes.” Thus, the ongoing disconnect that pull-out special education support results in minimal observable improvement in classroom functioning.

This is not an uncommon scenario for students who need support in real-time situations. It was certainly my experience as a first-year teacher of third graders with special needs following the COVID pandemic. I taught in a brand-new school with no first-hand experience working with the students. Moments woven throughout the day led to challenging behaviors (i.e., refusal to work, destroying materials, items thrown at me) for numerous reasons: “This story is too hard”; “This book is for babies,”; “This story is non-fiction,”; “I always have to go first,”; “You changed the schedule,”; “No, I’m not getting off my Chrome book.” The behaviors occurred while the staff implemented the recommendations developed in the student’s Behavior Support Plan (BSP) following a Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA). My student, who I adored and sympathized with after all he’d been through – had a very high Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) score. This means he had experienced multiple traumatic childhood events. He needed help getting through the tough moments. He was intelligent and fully capable of responding correctly in the quiet of our social worker’s office when she asked what an appropriate reaction might look like when the student began to feel anxious. He listed

appropriate behaviors: asking for a break, asking for help, and asking for a fidget. He was aware of his resources, but his ability to implement the strategies in a moment of crisis in a general education classroom was limited. As a result, it was exasperating to be told that my staff and I must reduce our reliance on the Behavior Support Team for student support calls and we should "handle it in the classroom." It was also frustrating to have an overly friendly tone of voice *modeled* by administration asking, "Can I help you buddy?" We were reminded to use helpful posture and close proximity when offering assistance. My staff and I were worried about getting too close. We had been the target of dangerous projectiles before.

There is research documenting the value in giving students an opportunity to discuss their behavior, reflect on situations, and actively engage in creating a list of alternative choices. However, services in a separate setting as the only option for special education service delivery leaves teachers and students feeling unsupported. Having specialists, not solely paraprofessionals, work with EBD students during tasks that are more likely to cause agitation may be the answer. Delivering special education services in the classroom provides several benefits: specialists can observe the student's responses to various demands and unique events; specialists have an opportunity to support the student through a challenge using authentic strategies, not role-play; and staff can evaluate the student's responses to determine which strategies are the most effective.

Hughes and Riccomini (2019) found that the most effective and efficient method for teaching students with disabilities was Explicit Instruction (EI). Hughes and Riccomini's (2019) conclusion came with the following explanation:

> Its effectiveness as a teaching approach for struggling students comes from a strong focus on using instructional behaviors or elements that provide clarity by giving students

> appropriate levels of support, guidance, and scaffolds, as well as multiple opportunities to respond (OTR), followed by effective feedback. (p. 235)

If students are not taught in the mainstream classroom where academic demands are placed on them and where organic socially challenging situations occur, support involving multiple OTR appropriately, along with effective and immediate feedback, is not present. The absence of support for coping when regulation deficits emerge may also indicate stunted academic growth. The academic delay may trigger the outbursts. Academic instruction is then replaced by behaviors that consume the bulk of time and energy available. Given this, students may not make the same strides towards academic and behavioral goals as they could with EI and guided practice. Burke et al. (2023) discussed this when describing the cyclical nature of academic and behavioral challenges jointly displayed by students with EBD. Because the initial educational barrier is unclear, the question becomes: Do behaviors prevent academic progress or do academic difficulties cause behaviors? It is critical to address both challenges simultaneously.

The guiding research question for this thesis is: Which type of special education service delivery model results in growth and lasting improvement in classroom functioning for students with EBD, a pull-out approach or a combination of pull-out and push-in minutes? Areas to consider when examining this topic are the: core elements of effective inclusion practices and the forms they take; challenges implementing inclusion practices; and how are students with EBD impacted by interactions with peers in the general classroom environment.

# Chapter II

## Literature Search Procedures

To find the literature and information for this thesis, searches of Education Journals and Articles available in ERIC were conducted for studies and publications from 2017-2024. The key words that were used in these searches included “inclusion practices,” “students with emotional behavioral disorders (EBD),” “effective interventions,” “effectiveness of push-in services,” “effectiveness of pull-out minutes,” “barriers to inclusion,” and “delivering services to students with EBD.” This chapter will review the literature on effectiveness of special education services in a strictly pull-out approach compared to the growth students with emotional behavioral disorder (EBD) demonstrate when receiving both pull-out and push-in minutes.

### Importance & Effective Facilitation of Inclusion

While social skills instruction has yielded some positive results for students struggling to interact appropriately, much of the gains remain limited in duration and students have too often only developed an *understanding* of what acting appropriately is without actually gaining the ability to execute the skills when experiencing real-life situations. Social deficits extend beyond social skills functioning and have been linked to such negative outcomes as peer rejection (leading to a sense of isolation and depression), poor academic performance, higher school dropout rates, and, for some individuals, a future involving psychological disorders, and criminal activity. These challenges formed the basis for a case study of one 7-year old, second-grade male student that focused on the same principle question: Would instruction that goes beyond following a set curriculum in one artificial environment be more effective in promoting generalization than only providing instruction in environments which don’t reflect where the student typically has difficulty? Landrum et al. (2018) hypothesized that the student used

inappropriate social behaviors during unstructured time to gain peer attention and that with social skills instruction, prosocial behaviors would increase and inappropriate social behaviors would decrease. This type of instruction involves whole-class and small group activities where specific skills are introduced and modeled, staff implements monitored activities giving students practice and support, as needed with prompt feedback. Students effectively demonstrate the desired skills and have opportunities to receive praise in front of and by their peers (Landrum et al., 2018).

For the subject of this study, Landrum et al. (2018) chose a student diagnosed with a regulation disorder and ADHD. He was also identified as a Student Requiring Intensive Behavior Intervention (SRIBI). This student was selected due to persistent challenges where he exhibited inappropriate behaviors (i.e. grabbing and/or hitting others, yelling at peers, and making undesirable gestures) vs. utilizing prosocial behaviors. Researchers identified four problem behaviors and four prosocial behaviors that were monitored during morning or lunch recess for 10–15-minute intervals one to two times per week. Four problem and four prosocial behaviors relating to classroom functioning were also identified and defined to guide the direct observations conducted during academic tasks which followed lunch recess. The intervals in which the student displayed these four inappropriate or appropriate behaviors during recesses and the afternoon academic block were observed and calculated as a percentage. The case study was a single-subject A-B design with follow-up after withdrawal of intervention across the recess and classroom settings. The design included a baseline and treatment condition with follow-up measurement at seven and 14 weeks. Inter-observer agreement and treatment fidelity results were strong. The results of the case study indicated notable improvement was made. Unexpectedly, behavior during recess and in the classroom improved when only the recess intervention was provided. Improvement was maintained for over three months following the intervention. In a

discussion of the case-study, a clear limitation was acknowledged that only one student was tracked so more research is needed to confirm whether the results would generalize to other students.

An exploratory study conducted by McGuire & Meadan (2022) gathered qualitative data through interviews administered to 13 elementary teachers in Illinois. The two guiding research questions framed were: a) What were the perceptions of elementary general educators regarding how students with EBD are socially included in general education settings?; and b) What has been observed as facilitators and barriers to social inclusion of students with EBD? The impetus to focus on the perspectives of general educators originated from the understanding that the general education classroom is the hub for all students, including those with disabilities. Because students spend the majority of their day in the classroom, it is the prime location that impacts development. To support this, data from Illinois suggested that 36% of elementary students with EBD spent more than 80% of the school day in their general education classroom; and 16% spent 40-79% of the day in general education. This also meant the general education teacher was in a unique position to form close bonds with students and guide their growth through classroom structure and activities. Despite this data however, the researchers found limited literature on social inclusion, specifically for students with EBD, even though their very disability category makes it clear that social and emotional well-being are exactly where support is needed most.

This void regarding the inclusion of students with EBD may stem back to the definition of inclusion itself or, more so, appreciating that there are two types of inclusion that are necessary for development. McGuire & Meadan (2022) used this definition of *general* inclusion: 'when students with disabilities actively participate in classroom activities, and many educators believe that it is linked to academic learning and achievement as opposed to social–emotional

learning and development.' Equally important is *social* inclusion involving: 'children with disabilities being integrated into classroom and school communities, having equal and active participation in social activities with typically developing peers, and having opportunities for reciprocal and positive relationships with peers and adults typically developing peers, and having opportunities for reciprocal and positive relationships with peers and adults.' Past research shows emphasis on the academic needs and performance during general inclusion, leaving social inclusion to non-structured environments such as recess and as bi-products of academic classroom interactions. McGuire & Meadan (2022) drew on data illustrating the various challenging behaviors exhibited by elementary students with EBD in the classroom. The data showed continued challenges into adulthood when students were not adequately supported during their developmental years with encouraged focus on social inclusion. Researchers also claimed that, while nurturing social and emotional needs is important for the subject, a tangible relationship exists between social-emotional well-being and academic capabilities. This provided a practical base for intentional social inclusion practices.

By administering interviews, McGuire & Meadan (2022) learned that all 13 general education teachers (representing all primary grades with the exception of grade two), believed strongly in the importance of having their students with EBD in the general classroom as much as possible. They felt that, while sometimes necessary due to severe behaviors, the unfortunate removal resulted in lost opportunities for spontaneous, natural interactions with peers and a weakened sense of being fully part of the classroom community. Rather than having students present intermittently, the teachers expressed a desire for more support from colleagues and professional development for themselves. The kindergarten to third grade teachers were more successful in creating an inclusive culture, albeit mainly via morning meeting, brief periods of

free time, and birthday celebrations. The fourth and fifth grade teachers however, possibly due to increased academic challenges, felt the social component for students at school had evolved to recess only. All stated they felt ill-equipped to provide true, evidence-based social inclusion practices to support students who had experienced trauma. For this, they felt their social workers were a critical asset and collaboration yielded positive results. However, social workers served many roles and carried high caseloads which hindered potentially greater benefits. In contrast, the teachers did not feel sufficient collaboration with special education teachers occurred. Special educator involvement predominantly occurred during pull-out services or crisis calls removing students from class. The general education teachers believed that special educators could utilize their expertise to work jointly in creating a culture of intentional inclusion, an "invisible hand" so to speak, crafting activities that helped students with EBD and their peers feel accepted. They also wished to be better prepared to: address behavioral issues as they occurred, support students with a history of trauma, and desired push-in services to be more effective.

Student participation can be challenging in any classroom, but especially challenging for students with EBD. Reasons include an insecurity with understanding questions or answers, an unwillingness to reveal knowing the answer for fear of attracting a negative label from peers, or a general avoidance of speaking and/or lack of interest in school. Unfortunately, this lack of participation robs educators of opportunities to praise students for their engagement. When productive participation is low, disruptive behavior is conversely higher. The result is increased disapproving feedback or removal from class that causes students to miss instruction altogether. Teachers then lack knowledge of students' conceptual understanding (Riden et al., 2020).

Active Student Responding (ASR) is considered any verbal, written, or other observable response from a student which confirms they are paying attention and making an effort to

understand academic material. Notably, when students are engaged with classroom tasks, disruptive behavior is mitigated allowing instruction to be delivered effectively. Teachers can make real-time formative assessments regarding aspects that are understood and which concepts may need review. To garner focus and participation, Riden et al. (2020) discussed Kahoot!, Google Forms, and iClicker as three electronic methods shown to boost rates of engagement. When implemented effectively, electronic approaches provide teachers a user-friendly formative assessment that can be tailored to prompt responses suitable to students' current levels of understanding.

The flexibility of using electronic options is one compelling reason to utilize electronic ASR tools. Students can demonstrate their level of understanding through game-based assessments or teacher-created multiple choice and short-answer forms while furnishing teachers with a tangible record of student responses to guide instruction. Riden et al. (2020) found that electronic submission modes stimulated response levels and provided students with a sense of ease because their answers remained private. Students retained access to the assessments giving them the additional benefit of reviewing the material multiple times prior to summative assessments. This resulted in greater student confidence as units were completed.

**Peer Impact & Peer Implemented Interventions**

Wang et al. (2022) considered the impact of Peer-Mediated Interventions (PMIs) as an intense intervention to more effectively support students with emotional behavioral disorders. Their approach stated that establishing positive relationships with peers was essential to a student's overall development and that the behaviors exhibited by students with EBD, due to their lack of social skills, could interfere with creating and keeping relationships. The lack of peer acceptance could result in feelings of rejection and isolation. Because social skills

deficiency can lead to large behavior displays with effects reaching beyond social functioning (such as academic performance), students with EBD often require additional support. In response to the connection found between peer relationships the ability for EBD students to function appropriately, the data suggested that planned peer interactions could positively develop relationships.

To obtain evidence that the PMI was effective, 12 studies reviewed and identified peer modeling, peer evaluation, and role-play as three additional PMI strategies that supplemented proximity, prompting and reinforcement, and peer initiation, the initial pillars of PMI (Wang et al., 2022). The overall findings of the study indicated success was often achieved when PMI strategies were implemented with documentation of a reduction in target behaviors. Multiple strengths of this approach were noted. The first, and possibly the most important for the emotional well-being of the focus student, was that the approach provided a friendship experience and positive peer support. Because peers delivered the intervention, improved interactions served the dual role of being a natural facilitator while also being the goal. Another strength was more practical. When staffing challenges arose, the strategy utilized willing students, determined to be qualified and subsequently trained, with no additional cost or materials needed. Concerns around implementation, maintenance, and generalization existed, as it may have been more challenging to find student volunteers who met the needs for peer prompting and reinforcement. Limited future opportunities to continue the intervention with the same peers may have also diminished the lasting strides made while the intervention was in place. Lastly, a fairly demanding investment of time was required for the planning and preparation stages of this intervention when selecting either an individual or multiple peers to participate as role models. Selecting peers was followed by conducting several training sessions

to familiarize the role models with specific language to use, how to cue, and appropriate responses. Though evidence suggested this approach could be very successful, particularly because it occurred in natural environments and situations, staff would also need to carefully oversee the execution of the intervention to support the peers and the focus students and to ensure treatment fidelity (Wang et al., 2022).

Given that the majority of students identified with EBD are in the general education classroom for 80% of the day, Dunn et al. (2017) observed an opportunity to review effective interventions specifically within that environment. This interest was reinforced by data which showed that general education teachers tended to implement a reactionary approach to addressing difficult behaviors, often in the form of punishment and/or removal from class. There is a need to use a more preventative strategy which allows for increased instructional time and reduced student impact to counter, what has become, an expected negative future cycle.

Initial findings of available research found a disappointing number of studies related to interventions which benefitted students academically. Instead, the bulk of research targeted behavioral interventions – highlighting that it is challenging to support student academic needs until a foundation of general behavioral functioning has been established. Dunn et al. (2017) compiled a review of 24 studies involving 288 students who met the EBD criteria and received Peer Mediated Interventions (PMI). The studies included single and group studies with varied age groups and occurred in multiple settings that included primarily restrictive or resource room settings. Eight PMI's were observed throughout the research: Classwide Peer Tutoring (CWPT), Cooperative Learning, Cross-Age Tutoring, Peer Tutoring, Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS), Peer Assessment, Peer Modeling, and Peer Reinforcement. Though analysts identified limitations, consistent results indicated a medium to meaningful effect size (ES) in all academic

content areas and was convincing enough to conclude that PMI was worth implementing in the general education classroom. In addition to students who remained on task longer and performed better academically, the types of PMI's offered variety to students, were inexpensive and relatively easy to implement, and produced positive results for both the target student and the tutor. The study also taught non-disabled peers how to respond to disruptive behavior and embrace their classmates with challenging behaviors (Dunn et al., 2017).

Echoing Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Pereira & Lavoie (2018) turned attention to the need for safety, both physical and emotional, and sense of belonging all humans require. Too often these needs are inadequately met. This may be especially true for students with EBD for numerous reasons. EBD students generally struggle with recognizing and applying social norms; academic challenges noticed by peers can present an easy target for taunting; the pairing of seemingly illogical social dynamics along with an accumulation of relational let downs can lead to pervasive feelings of mistrust. Challenges with peers that develop into an apparent negative pattern of behaviors can lead decision-makers to steer away from inclusive practices and opt for placement in alternative settings. The complex feelings experienced by students, the primary stakeholders, have not been evaluated to determine the impact.

In a qualitative study of six high school participants from a large district in Canada, Pereira & Lavoie (2018) sought to understand student perspectives through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). While students had individual experiences, common experiences and trajectories were set in motion. All noted teasing initially began in elementary school but could be more easily overcome due to the nature of the teasing and oversight from teachers. Using semi-structured interviews and visual mapping, the students outlined their journey from general education settings to alternative programs, following years of enduring

difficulty with more complicated social dynamics and less staff and administrative intervention or appearances of concern. As the students moved from elementary to secondary school, the predictability of relationships diminished. Friendships could inexplicably end and become the source of torment. As the foundation of once reliable relationships collapsed, bullying intensified at the high school level to the point where one participant explained:

> I don't know, they'd follow me home. They'd like. . . I don't know. As I was walking home they'd call me names, they'd push me into ditches and . . . I was coming home with bruises, because of kids…(p. 20)

When students informed teachers of these events, they committed to addressing the acts of social and physical assaults, but little was done to curb the attacks, especially those that occurred off school grounds and via social media. School-wide bully prevention efforts were equally ineffective with another participant stating, 'Oh, and they have these nonbullying days with the pink shirt and stuff. They shouldn't even have that at that school, honestly,' (Pereira & Lavoie, 2018).

Feeling isolated from peers and invalidated by teachers, participants naturally developed their own coping mechanisms, including intentionally being "bad" in order to spend time with their one staff ally. Skipping school and drug use contributed to an already poor school performance. After feeling pushed too far, self-defense responses were deemed as acts of violence and the final straw for alternative school placement. Through their inquiries, Pereira & Lavoie (2018) learned of the frustration participants experienced at being mis-identified as aggressors, their feelings of abandonment by a system charged with keeping them safe, and depression over being placed away from the few teachers with whom they'd developed meaningful bonds. Given the participants' stress, academics were nearly impossible to prioritize.

The researchers also endorsed looking at the EBD criteria, particularly the language of 'an inappropriate response to a situation,' because, in the situations students described, their responses may have been entirely appropriate and understandable. Greater emphasis should be placed on thorough functional behavior assessments (FBAs) to examine the true context of behaviors along with strengthening teacher-student relationships while offering non-punitive measures to support students. This would provide both security and the actual instruction needed for functional development. Without investing attention on the social and emotional needs of students with EBD in the area of bullying and resultant evaluations, it would be unreasonable to expect academic outcomes to improve or the overall harmful trajectories of the students' lives to be altered (Pereira & Lavoie, 2018).

Numerous challenges across multiple domains exist for students with or at-risk for EBD, including academically and behaviorally. The challenges often set into motion negative long-term effects that become increasingly difficult to mitigate and, instead, extend the achievement gap and future life outcomes. Evidence demonstrates that students identified with EBD by the age of seven or eight, who have deficits in mathematics, typically have school records that highlight difficulties in basic number sense and numeracy concepts as at-risk kindergarteners. Aware of this link, while also observing data presenting positive academic effects with cross-age tutoring, Watts et al. (2020) conducted a two-fold study using fifth and sixth grade students with EBD as tutors for at-risk kindergarteners. The impetus for the study was to measure the academic effects of receiving a mathematically-focused intervention using a number-line board game for the kindergarteners while simultaneously collecting behavioral data for the fifth and sixth graders who participated as tutors.

Baseline data was collected during an introduction and training for tutors and tutees. The intervention lasted 10 weeks, followed by a four-week maintenance phase. Five tutee-tutor pairs were established who met three times per week for 25–30-minute sessions. In addition to research questions related to the academic impact for math skills of tutees and behavioral outcomes for the tutors, Watts et al. (2020) also analyzed how consistently and accurately the tutors delivered instruction. The overall fidelity of the intervention was satisfactory, but improved after four tutors received additional training within the first three weeks, to a level greater than 90% fidelity across tutors.

The results of the study yielded positive outcomes on many levels. Regarding social validity, the intervention was embraced favorably by teachers. Without dispute, any intervention is only as good as its ease of implementation and the committed attitude of those charged with executing it. The number-line board game left all stake-holders with positive perceptions about the reasonable investment of time required for training, the tutors' ability to work with tutees, and the likelihood of continued use of the strategy. All five tutees demonstrated improvement with slight to large trajectories and low variability within the positive trend. To monitor the tutors' behavioral trends, a Check-In/Check-Out (CICO) method overseen by teachers was used. Though one tutor experienced regression, all tutors displayed improvement for both externalizing and internalizing behaviors. Based on the behavioral progression of two tutors, their at-risk status categorization adjusted from "high" to "moderate. The tutors reported feelings of pride in the support they provided to their tutees, as this experience apparently provided an opportunity to "rise to the occasion" and elevated their self-perception. Teachers confirmed these findings with their observations of decreased challenging behaviors, longer on-task time, and students who

expressed a desire to participate in future cross-age tutoring interventions – a promising array of results.

In light of the need to identify strategies which are *contextually fit*, those which are compatible with the skills, resources, and routines of the implementers, Canfield & Cividini-Motta (2022) opted to uniquely examine the effectiveness of Daily Behavior Report Cards (DBRC). The justification for their experimental study was that contextually fit interventions increased the likelihood they would be executed with fidelity and may help prevent over-burdened teachers who shoulder a daunting range of responsibilities. Previous data has shown that both DBRC and peer-mediated interventions have both effectively reduced disruptive behaviors. However, no literature was found that combined the two interventions. Therefore, researchers collected evidence for three students in grades 1-3 who were identified as at-risk for EBD. The target students were partnered with an appropriate peer to determine whether the peers could carry out the intervention with integrity and if a reduction of disruptive behaviors would result.

Following baseline data, a point system was established with a menu of preferred items received by the target students upon earning enough points. Only positive reinforcement was involved; there was no punishment for engaging in disruptive behavior or non-compliance. Another distinct aspect of the Canfield & Cividini-Motta (2022) study was the creation of a functional behavior assessment (FBA) to compare the results of the intervention alongside the antecedents and consequences. The third question: is a function-based DBRC necessary to decrease disruptive behavior? The common antecedents were demands being presented and a lack of attention. The common consequence was receiving desired attention followed by escape. Baseline data indicated that the three target students engaged in disruptive behavior for 46%,

47%, and 68% of opportunities, allowing them to earn rewards approximately 20% of the time or less during teacher-implemented DBRC.

Using peers in this role versus the typical modeling, prompting, and Check-In/Check-Out (CICO) procedures, the study found that peer mediators followed the intervention with 100% integrity. In contrast, teachers were found to adhere to the intervention with an average of 77.5%-97% fidelity. Behavioral outcomes led to a near reversal of previous figures. When introduced to DBRC with a peer, the second-grade male decreased to 27% of demonstrated behaviors, the third-grade male reduced to 13% (earning 79% of available points), and the first-grade male reduced to 13% of disruptive behaviors (earning 92% of available points). Observations during the maintenance period reflected continued improvement and all parties (target students, peers, and teachers) expressed an interest in continuing the intervention. Interestingly, an unintentional component not specifically measured was the impact of providing attention prior to intervals that were historically challenging for the target students. Having a peer preview possible rewards if on-task behavior was shown provided an element of attention, as did the reward itself, which was often time with a preferred person. While more avenues and iterations of this intervention were discussed, Canfield & Cividini-Motta (2022) found DBRC as a means to incorporate existing resources that yields positive results for this high-risk population.

Much of the literature available on the inclusion experience for students with emotional behavioral disorders (EBD) focused on male students (Whitlow et al., 2019). This, in part, can be attributed to the fact that EBD presents differently in males compared to females. Males tend to show aggressive behavior, while females may display more attention deficits, relational conflicts, withdrawal, and depression. This results in misdiagnosis with behaviors being ignored. Adults may label the behavior “teenage drama”. The available literature primarily considered females in

the context of the juvenile detention system. As legislation and the educational philosophy of inclusion has evolved, it is important to understand this lived experience from the perspective of students.

In a qualitative study of three middle and early high school-aged females, Whitlow et al. (2019) interviewed the students, a close family member, a teacher, and other staff who worked with the girls to understand their feelings and insights. A commonality that surfaced for all girls was the absence of a close and reliable adult who could provide the affection needed to form healthy bonds and a sense of security that helps shape functional, future relationships. In addition to early childhood trauma that appeared to carry over into their school lives, each girl continued to have some form of dysfunctional family dynamic and lacked a supportive relationship with at least one biological parent. All three students were diagnosed with EBD in either preschool or elementary school due to behaviors such as substantial crying, yelling, and kicking, difficulty staying on task, non-typical interactions with peers, frequent noncompliance with staff, among other challenges. In many cases, a functional behavior assessment (FBA) determined that attention-seeking and work avoidance were two main causes for the behaviors. Coupled with regulation deficits, full-time instruction in the general education classroom was not plausible.

Family members expressed mixed feelings when asked for a perspective of their child's history, special education experience, and outlook for the future. They confirmed negative behaviors and a lack of decision-making skills, which justified individual programming. Though the parents preferred inclusion for their child with the general education peers, parents held strong concerns around boundaries and vulnerability due to misreading social cues and trusting anyone who appeared friendly. Family members also relayed varied experiences with staff, but all spoke to the value of having one staff member who could form a positive connection with

their student. The students also shared their desire to attend the mainstream classroom, but recalled being bullied and felt misunderstood by peers and teachers. Years of periodic confrontation and being seasoned recipients of interventions was reflected in their doubt of ever participating full-time in the general classroom. One student even voiced sadness at the lack of attention in the general classroom saying, "Just because I get really better at something, ya know what I mean, they automatically assume that I don't need special attention anymore…They still need to remember that I am a girl with…problems." All cases reinforced evidence of the lasting effects of deep-rooted trauma, the carry-over into school functioning, and the need for intensive interventions with strong social worker support (Whitlow et al., 2019).

**Qualities of Effective Interventions**

While inclusion for all students is certainly the ideal educational experience which all involved in the educational field strive for, Rivera & McKeithan (2021) recognized that it does not always yield successful outcomes for students who receive special education services. The study focused on an inclusive approach to instruction and noted that inclusion was not a practice operating on auto-pilot that guaranteed positive results. Simply including all students in the classroom cannot be equated to inclusion. Rather, it requires the specific use of high-leverage practices (HLPs) to be effective. Additionally, past emphasis in classroom inclusion focused on academics and failed to intentionally target and support students' social, behavioral, and emotional needs. This gap left students unprepared to interact with their peers in the respectful means necessary to experience a fulfilling classroom community. It also revealed a need for teachers to learn to incorporate comprehensive instruction. In preparing teachers to proactively create an influentially positive setting and anticipate possible responses, the likelihood for

students to meet or exceed expectations should increase along with the potential to generalize skills across multiple settings (Rivera & McKeithan, 2021).

Rivera & McKeithan (2021) identified four evidence-based HLPs impacting student social, emotional, and behavioral well-being were identified: establish a consistent, organized, and respectful learning environment; provide positive and constructive feedback to guide student learning and behavior; teach social behaviors; and utilize Functional Behavior Assessments (FBAs) to develop individual student Behavior Support Plans (BSPs). Each HLP exhibits defining elements that transform practices to *high-leverage* caliber. Promoting respect for the learning environment means teaching students to follow along with the structure in place, appreciate resources available, and be considerate of others who share the space – all beneficial skills for classroom success and beyond. Teaching students to differentiate between negative and constructive feedback helps their future functioning and requires a great deal of planning prior to, during, and following activities to ensure an ample amount of positive comments are provided. This strengthens self-esteem and helps students develop healthy associations with feedback. Due to social skills deficits, direct instruction with numerous strategic and controlled opportunities to practice appropriate peer engagement, can help students create deeply sought connections that are often otherwise out of reach. Finally, the critical aspect of an FBA is collaboration among staff so all use the same language, strategies, and adherence to the BSP. The research findings indicated that the use of evidence-based practices produced a moderate-strong effect for both academics and behavior (Rivera & McKeithan, 2021).

In an article looking closely at the role of special educators with regard to intervention implementation, Farmer et al. (2016) suggested it was time to redefine that role and introduce a higher degree of specialization and coordination among all facets of a student's life. Sufficient

data confirmed that students with EBD were at a much higher risk for future difficulties, including dropping out of school, substance abuse, employment challenges, and dysfunctional relationships. While school age, the severity of behaviors could be beyond the capacity of the general education teacher and staff to adequately address, even when implementing prescribed interventions. Numerous reasons for this exist; one is the influence of external factors and the student's ability to respond to the demands of typical classroom activities on any given day. External influences may include the student's home life, history of trauma, financial situation, resources (or lack thereof) in the community, cultural and religious belief systems, and even the political climate – especially as it pertains to custody and child welfare regulations. This also means that, not only do students with EBD frequently display volatile behaviors, their needs – and necessary interventions – may be more in flux than is found with other identified disability categories. Though external factors occur outside the purview of the educational arena, Farmer et al. (2016) contended that it behooves education professionals involved with the student to raise their efforts in developing interventions which create alignment among all domains of the student's life.

To effectively serve students with EBD in a way that supports them during the school day while being mindful of the needs and circumstances present once they leave school grounds, Farmer et al. (2016) stated that an evolution was necessary to determine how services were delivered. First, it was critical to recognize that relatively more recent evidence-based practices (EBPs), such as the tiered intervention framework offered by Schoolwide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS), was not sufficiently individualized. While these strategies were indeed beneficial and provided an enhanced level of positive dynamics within a school, the effects served to raise the foundation as a whole and did not immediately target the very unique

needs of students with high needs. In other words, tiered interventions still fall into an "off the shelf" category of service leaving the need for tailored, intensified services to be filled. Secondly, to design these intensified services, it is necessary to elevate the role of special educators to *intervention specialists*. Special educators are already considered for their expertise in addressing the unique needs of students. The frequency of their involvement in implementing interventions needs to increase. Additionally, to support special educators in the intervention specialist capacity, *intervention specialist coordinators* are needed to create synergy in understanding all domains of a student's life. The premise of this role is to ensure interventions aren't developed for the school setting that may aggravate another area of life or fail to serve the student with generalization of skills or long-term success due to either limited scope of understanding or a push for immediate results vs the development of lasting skills.

Farmer et al. (2016) drew on Dynamic Systems Theory (DST) to speak about how all domains of life contribute to human functioning. As a result, for vulnerable youth it is imperative to have coordinators who are intimately aware of student needs and changing factors to facilitate adjustments quickly, allowing the best possibility for continued positive results. Researchers noted that individuals in specialized roles required extensive training and education. They recommend masters, doctorate and/or clinical level backgrounds with suitable compensation to accompany their experience. There is no lack of evidence to demonstrate the strong probability of challenged futures awaiting many students with EBD. The only *controllable* variable remaining is the funding and training investment provided if, as a society, there is shared belief this data can be impacted and improved upon.

Much of the literature available supports a few key realities: students with disabilities (SWD), including those with Emotional Behavioral Disorder (EBD), spend the majority of their

day in the general education classroom; students with EBD struggle more often behaviorally and academically than their peers, such that they can be anywhere from 1-2 grade levels behind in one or more subject areas; and general education teachers need more guidance in providing strategies which help students with EBD be successful in the classroom. Given these widely accepted factors, the field of education needs to address the components of effective instruction to support students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Hughes et al. (2019) presented Explicit Instruction (EI) as an exemplar of effective instructional practices for teaching lessons and planning activities. Before teachers can simplify instruction for students, teachers need instructional approaches simplified for them. Rather than a specific instructional strategy, Hughes et al. (2019) described EI as a group of coordinated instructional *elements*. Hughes et al. (2017, p.143) defined explicit instruction as:

> "A group of research-supported instructional behaviors used to design and deliver instruction that provides needed supports for successful learning through clarity of language and purpose, and reduction of cognitive load. It promotes active student engagement by requiring frequent and varied responses, followed by appropriate affirmative and corrective feedback, and assists long-term retention through the use of purposeful, independent practice strategies."

Education mandates are often in the form of policy names and end goals, leaving the teachers to determine how to execute the work. The elements of identified EI are represented under four major categories: *content*, *design of instruction*, *delivery of instruction*, and *independent practice*. Highly specific steps and explanations, along with useful examples, are provided to aide educators in delivering EI while realizing the vision of individualized and differentiated education.

Due to limited time and student capacity for academic engagement, Hughes et al. (2019) emphasized the need to: 1. Focus instruction on critical content; 2. Sequence skills logically; and 3. Break down complex skills and strategies into smaller instructional units (Chunking). Lesson planning included these critical components: 4. Design organized and focused lessons; 5. Begin lessons with a clear statement of the lesson purpose and your expectations; 6. Verify the prior skills and knowledge needed before beginning instruction; 7. Provide step-by-step demonstrations; 8. Use clear, concise, and consistent language; 9. Provide an adequate range of examples and non-examples; and 10. Provide guided and supported practice.

Effective delivery of instruction calls for robust student participation with ample opportunities to respond (OTR) which indirectly produces opportunities for progress monitoring. Instructional elements include: 11. Require frequent student responses; 12. Monitor student performance closely; 13. Provide immediate affirmative and corrective feedback; 14. Deliver the lesson at a brisk pace; and 15. Help students organize knowledge. If all elements have been incorporated well, Hughes et al. (2019) viewed the critical final step as: 16. Provide Purposeful Independent Practice (PIP).

This thorough road map gives teachers the "how" to provide EI which ensures the greatest chance for students to receive information taught at an appropriate pace, practice skills in a monitored fashion to safely make errors and course-correct promptly, and retain and generalize skills for long-term maintenance. In discussion, the authors fully acknowledged no intervention guarantees success with every student. However, they have found EI to be the most broad in scope providing support to the fullest extent for those who need it, flexibility for those who require less or need variation, plus calculated fading of support (Hughes et al., 2019).

Knowing that students identified as at-risk or having EBD typically spend the majority of their school day in the general education classroom, Caldarella et al. (2019) sought to investigate student behavior based on the effects of praise-to-reprimand ratios (PRR). This is a uniquely valuable topic, as few general education teachers have received special education training – specifically pertaining to challenging student behaviors. This, combined with thin resources, creates a need for low-cost interventions that offer ease of implementation. Data has shown an association between praise and positive feedback to increased on-task behavior, focus, and general enthusiasm making PRR a viable classroom management strategy. Two other variables served as the launchpad for the exploration: students at-risk or those identified as having EBD receive a greater proportion of reprimands than their peers and a reciprocal correlation has been observed between high reprimands and greater disruptive behavior.

Using the widely held 3:1 to 4:1 ratio as an acceptable PRR range for the general population of students, Caldarella et al. (2019) conducted a study of 540 students and 149 teachers from 19 elementary schools throughout Missouri, Tennessee, and Utah. Three specific research questions guided their work: 1. How are teacher PRRs related to the classroom engagement of students at risk for EBD compared to the engagement of typically developing peers?; 2. How are teacher PRRs related to the classroom disruption rates of students at risk for EBD compared to the disruption rates exhibited by typically developing peers?; 3. Is there an optimal PRR for improving the classroom behavior of students at risk for EBD? Following administration of training teachers in Class-Wide Function-Related Intervention Teams (CW-FIT), a treatment group of 311 at-risk students and a control group of 229 comparison peers was established.

Data was gathered while students received instruction in all subject matters. Upon conclusion of the three-year study, the evidence was consistent with the previously held belief that increasing the amount of praiseful feedback increased on-task behavior for at-risk students. Reprimands, however, did little to reverse disruptive behavior, possibly illustrating the importance of proactively keeping students in a productive and hopeful frame of mind. An interesting result was that there was no notable effect for comparison peers – it appeared that they were going to be more engaged and compliant regardless of whether they received praise beyond the 3:1 precedent. In terms of the number needed to raise the engagement of at-risk students to a level comparable to their peers, the findings indicated a substantially larger PRR, 9:1, than anticipated. Whether due to trauma or one of the other numerous factors contributing to EBD, it seems the students significantly need, benefit, and will respond to positive feedback (Caldarella et al., 2019).

Though the Emotional Behavioral Disorder (EBD) identification speaks primarily to behavioral functioning, Kumm et al. (2021) reiterated that students who met criteria for EBD often displayed deficits in one or more academic areas. Behavioral challenges can negatively impact students' capacity to be non-disruptive, work in groups, and form fulfilling friendships. While not automatic or certain, the strong correlation of the two domains necessitates interventions targeting social and behavioral skills which support students' ability to cooperate, remain on task, and abstain from conduct which interferes with learning so they can access and benefit from instruction. The obstacle to providing this support are the many expressions of undesirable behavior that occur organically throughout the day, leaving over-burdened teachers ill-equipped to respond in spontaneous situations. Unlike an academic skill, where time can be

predictably segmented for targeted teaching, initial outbursts and disruptions or responses to unexpected events arise without notice.

Due to its importance, both because of the link to academic performance and the need all youth have for healthy social interaction and acceptance, Kumm et al. (2021) offered a framework for classroom teachers to provide their students social and behavioral support. Comprised of three phases, the systematic format outlined steps to follow while jointly allowing for adaptation and the individualization each student may need. During *Pre-Social Skills Practice Strategies* (Phase 1) the teacher discusses the importance of appropriate social skills with the student and presents scenarios or draws from recent events to ensure understanding of how inappropriate behaviors impeded the ability to reach goals. Next, the teacher and student jointly determine the behavior of greatest priority (i.e. swearing, blurting out, exploding at a transition or non-preferred task, etc.) followed by explicit instruction of the expected behavior accompanied by ample guided practice. Once the student demonstrates understanding within the confines of 1:1 practice, they progress to *Implementing Social Skills Practice Opportunities* (Phase 2). Utilizing a checklist, the teacher creates opportunities within the natural classroom environment, to practice the chosen skill via an evidence-based intervention. Offering validated interventions relevant to the skill are of utmost importance. Implemented alone or in conjunction with another, interventions include: peer-mediated practice and mentoring (with a peer whom the target student feels a comfortable rapport with); role-play; Social Stories; and video modeling. Once the chosen intervention has begun, *Monitoring Social Skills Practice Outcomes* (Phase 3) requires consistency and close monitoring to tailor the intervention in length, frequency, and intensity to meet the student's needs.

Among other foundational skills, including math and interpersonal skills, writing is an area where many students with emotional behavioral disorder (EBD) struggle, lagging significantly behind their same-age peers (Jolivette et al., 2024). Possessing a deficit in this expressive domain, unfortunately, presents broader challenges for EBD students as the ability to write is essential beyond school-age years and into adulthood. When developing appropriate instruction to guide students through the writing process, a student's past trauma must also be considered. Coaching elements of writing, such as summarizing, discussing the main idea, or teasing out critical details, is academically challenging. Students with EBD often present behavioral factors which can interrupt lessons and work time.

Students with EBD have a high likelihood of having experienced one or more adverse childhood experiences (ACE) including, exposure to violence, an incarcerated family member, transition or time in a residential facility, or economic insecurity. As a result, many seemingly benign writing prompts may be a trigger for students who go into a fight, flight or freeze mode. For example, a common writing prompt is a favorite holiday tradition, which could instead bring back a painful memory. The student may then display either disruptive or aggressive externalizing behavior or could also shutdown in an internalizing fashion. To prevent adding this emotional barrier to the already challenging task of acquiring writing skills, Jolivette et al. (2024) recommended employing SPA: Student prior knowledge; Potential student triggers; and Assessment needs. While it may not be possible to gather all relevant details about a student's history, utilizing what is known and consulting with other members of the professional team, such as the school social worker, can create topics to encourage rather than interfere with the student's ability to concentrate and regulate.

When a writing prompt unintentionally causes a trigger, Jolivette et al. (2024) offered steps from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to support a student through the experience: (a) safety, “I am here to help”; (b) trustworthiness, “It is ok to take a break”; (c) choice, “Here are a couple other topics you can choose”; (d) collaboration, “Can we work on ideas together?”; and (e) empowerment, “Your feelings about this are completely understandable”. An effective trauma-informed staff would also incorporate co-regulation into classroom practices. This involves working alongside the student to help them adopt the habit of positive self-talk, goal setting, self-monitoring, and evaluation of growth. When a student is faced with moments of heightened stress, implementing daily exercises in conjunction with calming and regulation strategies support building resiliency and create positive adult connections. Because co-regulation, a critical developmental experience, was absent for many students with EBD, the approach paved the way for students to validate and process difficult emotions and return to the task at hand.

The importance of utilizing evidence-based interventions when working with students with emotional behavior disorders (EBD) cannot be overstated. Yu & Sims (2024) postulated that strategy decisions should not be made solely on evidence-based data. There is a greater context that impacts the success, or lack thereof, for any intervention. Both **fidelity** – the level to which practitioners execute and adhere to a strategy in the manner in which it was designed – and **feasibility** – the *ability* for practitioners to carry out a strategy given the appropriateness for the student and resources available – must be judged. Much of the past research analysis puts the onus on staff fidelity for intervention results without fairly considering the other factors at play. In addition to the intervention design, the environment where evidence is gathered is critical, as

clinical research may not be as easily duplicated in natural settings. The quality of supports (i.e. training, administrative assistance, etc.) is yet another important element.

Yu & Sims (2024) focused on this broad concept and the evaluation results from the Tiers of Intensive Educationally Responsive Services (TIERS) program. Though they suggested that the aforementioned questions must be asked in all implementation settings, their data was collected from surveys of 60 staff who worked in 10 restrictive setting classrooms. TIERS stems from a multi-tiered support system (MTSS) approach where intensity is modest, begins with all students, becomes targeted, and increases for students who do not respond to interventions. Given the complex needs of students with EBD and challenges which often affect multiple domains, TIERS was presented as a comprehensive approach due to its 14 components: (a) establish, maintain, and restore positive relationships, (b) establish physiology to learn, (c) positive behavior supports, (d) social-emotional learning curricula, (e) proactive classroom management strategies, (f) good behavior game, (g) points and levels system, (h) progressive response system for problem behavior, (i) honors room and outings, (j) reboot room for reflective time, (k) effective academic instruction, (l) relentless outreach to parents, (m) daily debriefs among staff, and (n) self-governance meetings.

Following two years of self-reporting, Yu & Sims (2024) discovered that none of the classrooms adhered to the intervention with 100% fidelity and, in seven classrooms, fidelity actually declined. Of the 14 intervention components, daily debriefs among staff, self-governance meetings, and points and levels system were used the most. Multiple limitations of the research were discussed, not least of which were the outcomes of the intervention itself. One possible basis for the lack of fidelity was that not all components were necessary or benefitted students, which was ultimately the goal of the intervention. In contrast, it may mean that such a

comprehensive approach was not realistic or possible to execute. This was what Yu & Sims (2024) illustrated that the most sophisticated and seemingly ideal intervention would be of no benefit if it was not implemented with the needed frequency.

One of the more challenging aspects for EBD middle school students, and certainly a future post-school challenge, is their ability to recognize personal strengths and areas for growth and communicate that to others. For example, when experiencing adversity, anxiety and deficits with self-regulation may prevent students from having the self-control to express their feelings and request the support they need. These examples contribute to accumulated data that demonstrates patterns of behavior that interfere with productive time at school and the ability to successfully manage independent living, employment, and legal scenarios in adulthood. Balint-Langel & Riden (2022) attributed this difficulty to the transition from elementary school, where one classroom teacher is intimately familiar with the student, to middle school, which involves multiple teachers working with the student for a limited time each day. Self-advocacy skills become critical at this stage, so students can control their inclusion experience and have a voice in IEP decisions and transition meetings. Developing the ability to promote their skill set and voice their needs prepares students for post-secondary life. Evidence notes that this is a precarious time for many students with EBD.

The research-based Self-Advocacy Strategy (SAS), promotes self-determination and provides a manual for instructors to coach students through what *effective* self-advocacy looks like. Balint-Langel & Riden (2022) reviewed three studies that taught SAS to students with various disabilities, including EBD. The data showed that participation increased among all participants, providing a greater sense of control over their learning and their future. The SAS employs a five-step strategy known as I PLAN: the Inventory step asks students to identify their

strengths in education and/or transition, areas to improve or learn, goals and interests, accommodations, and choices for learning; the Provide step teaches students to articulate their skills, needs, and goals at appropriate times; the Listen and Respond step instructs students to engage in respectful exchanges (i.e. giving proper attention and avoiding interrupting); the Ask Questions step ensures students gather needed information; and, the Name Your Goals step helps students synthesize their initial wants with new information into complete goals.

The SAS process taught students the importance of using SHARE behaviors to effectively communicate and encourage the receptivity of others: Sit up straight; Have a pleasant tone of voice; Activate your thinking; Relax; and Engage in eye communication. The SAS strategy is compiled of seven instructional stages that progress from explicit instruction, modeling, and group practice, to independence – first in isolated settings and then generalized situations. Positive and corrective feedback were crucial to the success of the SAS strategy and the written plans and inventory gave students a reference point to monitor their growth. Balint-Langel & Riden (2022) asserted that the tools, in conjunction with the instructor manual, prepared students for a more fulfilling and satisfying role in their lives.

As a growing number of studies have indicated that students with EBD tend to struggle in multiple domains, it also became necessary to develop interventions which support both behavioral and academic needs. The absence of targeted interventions has led to what is known as a failure cycle that is observable and especially concerning in the performance of secondary students. At this level of schooling, students are increasingly exposed to increasingly complex concepts and sophisticated vocabulary which strains comprehension if foundational skills were not adequately developed at the primary level. It was with this focus that Sanders et al. (2018) investigated low-intensity strategies offering both the prospect for student success with

manageable implementation for teachers. Of particular interest was Self-Regulation Strategy Development (SRSD) to support comprehension along with on-task behavior.

Think Before, Think While, and Think After reading (TWA) is one type of SRSD with a three-phase approach comprised of nine steps beginning with modeling and advancing to guided and independent practice as mastery develops. This strategy is adjustable based on progress; it recruits the student as an active participant in their learning by monitoring their work as they check off tasks listed on a learning contract. Also embedded in SRSD are various types of (individual, paired, and choral) opportunities to respond (OTR). Evidence has shown OTR reduces disruptive behavior, including possible removal from class and interruptions in instruction, and promotes long-term learning. Sanders et al. (2018) linked an evidence-based partner to SRSD, behavior specific praise (BSP). When integrated, BSP such as, "Good job checking your reading speed and slowing down," provides an encouraging vehicle to reinforce specific expectations and builds a positive teacher-student relationship which benefits the student's overall attitude toward school.

Research indicates that interventions implemented with high fidelity yield better results than those partially or infrequently executed. Sanders et al. (2018) recognized maintaining fidelity is challenging for teachers who received scarce coaching and preparation, serve a range of student needs, all while attending to the impromptu events of the day. However, the self-monitoring checklist affords teachers the flexibility to add a missed skill to an upcoming lesson. This develops both student regulation and comprehension. When using this research-based approach, students have an increased chance to break out of the failure cycle, where the lines become blurry as to whether academic frustration causes behaviors, or the behaviors impede academic progress. Either way, it is all too familiar for students with EBD (Sanders et al., 2018).

**The Complexity of Academic and Behavioral Co-Morbidity**

In a single case study reviewed by Didion et al. (2020), data regarding classroom engagement was collected for five male middle school students with an Emotional Behavioral Disorder (EBD) during their self-contained mathematics instruction. The premise of the study was based on the following accepted knowns: a) students with EBD on average are academically 1.5 grade levels behind their peers by the end of elementary school; b) that this gap increases, particularly in mathematics, during middle school years; c) students with EBD exhibit more instances of disruptive behavior in class which also lead to greater rates of removal from class; d) more frequent occurrences of disruptive behavior are linked to reduced classroom engagement and learning. Further extending the impact of academic performance, approximately only 54% of students with EBD obtain a high school diploma with greater rates of under/unemployment observed in adulthood. The researchers stressed that less time in class actively engaged in learning during this crucial developmental time meant fewer opportunities to respond (OTR), an important factor in promoting information acquisition. With this, researchers investigated how providing response cards impacted OTR for students with EBD.

Though increasing OTR was the ultimate goal, response cards were the chosen method because they were a readily available low-cost school supply (white boards and dry erase markers) and easy to implement. Researchers also considered teacher stress, both due to loss of instructional time and being responsible for additional interventions. The fact that teachers needed only about 30 minutes of training to use response cards, followed by a brief introduction for students, was appealing and resulted in high (75 out of 90 for Social Validity) teacher ratings for use as a valuable classroom tool (Didion et al., 2020).

The study followed an A-B-A-B design over a one-month period. This allowed the primary investigator (PI) and research assistants (RA) to collect baseline data when hand-raising, the traditional form of classroom engagement, was used followed by response card responses. The response card intervention was removed for a period of time and reintroduced to capture data points among multiple scenarios. *Engagement* and *off-task* behavior were clearly defined to ensure observer agreement. Observations were made five days per week during 15-minute periods during when the teacher was asked to pose a minimum of 10 questions to students. During Phase A of small group instruction, baseline data reflected an average of 55.56% for student engagement. When the response card intervention was introduced (Phase B), there was a significant increase to 83.11% of average student engagement. When the response card intervention was withdrawn for Phase A – part 2, the percent of engaged intervals for the group averaged 47.41%. When response cards were reintroduced for Phase B – part 2, the increase in engaged behavior was once again observed at an average of 84.44%. On an individual performance basis, three students displayed an increase in active participation during both periods the response card intervention was employed. However, interesting results were documented for one student who actually declined in engagement during the Phase B period, but then rose above baseline levels when the intervention was reintroduced, indicating a possible need for time to adapt to new strategies (Didion et al., 2020).

Identified limitations of the study were the small sample size and the absence of data collected on actual academic performance. Opportunities for future research would be to examine if increased classroom engagement leads to improved academic performance and if more advanced tools (beyond dry erase boards) would yield better outcomes. Additionally, following the study, researchers returned for two additional days of observations. They found

that teachers continued to use the response cards as a strategy to encourage students to actively participate in class. Both the data reflecting a consistent increase in engagement among students and the voluntary continuation to utilize the intervention suggest promising links among response cards promoting OTR, increased instruction without interruption, and reliable intervention maintenance (Didion et al., 2020).

Academic deficits often go hand-in-hand with behavioral deficits for students with EBD. Facing challenges in both domains, students with EBD experience tougher realities all around including adverse relationships, alienation, harsher discipline, teasing, bullying, and gang involvement. Pulos et al. (2020) reported 2017 data from the U.S. Department of Education indicating that this population had the lowest graduation rate (53%) of students in high-incidence disability categories. Following eight subsequent years, these deficits clearly extended to post-school life in alarming ways. Researchers cited data showing that 37.7% enroll in vocational/technical training and 33.3% enroll in traditional college. Of those students, only 35.1% graduated. Furthermore, students with EBD reported lower levels of employment and greater changes in employment than other high incidence populations.

Given these statistics, Pulos et al. (2020) asserted there was a need to implement strategies that immediately increased academic skills while simultaneously paving the way for long-term success. Considering math, current interventions focused more on providing direct instruction to address lower-level skills without developing higher level skills, such as problem-solving. Pulos et al. (2020) proposed a partnership of two approaches – Schema-Based Instruction and Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction (SDLMI). Schema-based instruction including an "attack plan" has successfully improved individual mathematic skills, often an area of particular need for students with EBD. On a broad scale, self-mediated and/or

self-regulation interventions that transfer ownership to the student, have produced positive results for school performance equally across elementary, middle, and high school students.

SDLMI is a type of self-determination practice that recruits the student as an active participant in their growth. Research demonstrates that students who are more actively engaged in their learning display increased on-task behavior, experience a sense of empowerment, and gain applicable skills for future functioning, such as decision making. In an academic format, the role of the instructor evolves from being an authoritative figure with all the answers, to a supportive facilitator posing questions and offering guidance. Individualized teacher involvement is based on the student's capacity to drive the process and varies as the student achieves milestones and firmly attains skills. SDLMI consists of three phases: 1) Set a goal; 2) Take action; 3) Adjust goal or plan. All phases incorporate inquiry encouraging self-reflection and monitoring. The goal setting phase allows students to consider their interests and abilities while the action phase acknowledges the required steps, current barriers, and the resources available to overcome barriers. The third phase presents an opportunity to examine the process and conclude whether the goal has been met or revamp either the steps or goal, if not fully met. A single case study focused on a 17-year old male who experienced a turbulent academic career. He achieved remarkable success maintaining a job as a cashier using his improved math skills as he planned to create his own business. When exposed to the very planning and evaluation skills that would carry him into adulthood, the focus student experienced genuine pride and shed the defeatist inclinations he'd previously held, giving promise to this possibility for a larger number of students (Pulos et al., 2020).

The importance of literacy skills in overall academic success has been widely understood and established. Reading fluency contributes to the pace with which students can complete work.

Decoding and word recognition are essential for math problems; and overall comprehension plays a role in other subject areas including science and social studies. As a result, a multitude of evidence-based reading interventions have been created. Burke et al. (2023) postulated that for at-risk or EBD students, common reading interventions may not yield the same results or may require simultaneous behavioral interventions to be effective. The researchers based their theory on data indicating that students with EBD often lagged 1-2 grade levels behind students identified as having a learning disability (LD) in reading. The co-morbid presence of behavioral challenges and academic delays is a challenging hurdle that necessitates dual intervention approaches.

Record tracking suggests that the combination of EBD and academic struggles lends itself to greater interference with academic progress. It is not clear if frustration with academic abilities leads to behaviors or if regulation challenges cause disruptions in learning. The answer may be a fusion of both. It is important to acknowledge the existence of the relationship and the cyclical nature created so adequate strategies can be employed. In exploring existing research, Burke et al. (2023) found limited evidence-based reading interventions implemented with EBD students. When studies targeted this population, a great deal of the evidence noted that students often did not respond to the interventions and made little gains.

In an effort to identify which strategies produced positive results, Burke et al. (2023) reviewed seven studies including 27 (18 male, nine female) elementary students with EBD, emotional disturbance (ED), or severe emotional behavior disorder (SEBD). Most students had a secondary disability and averaged at least one grade level behind their same-age peers. The variable interventions studied were: repeated reading with error correction and performance feedback to a therapy dog; *Headsprout Comprehension* - an online, computerized program,

combined with regular basal reading instruction; reading aloud after listening to a computer model compared to reading aloud after listening to a teacher; self-graphing words read correctly per minute versus teacher-graphing (with error correction); peer-mediated instruction and repeated reading; and immediate versus 5-second delay intertrial intervals. Students ages 7-9 were impacted more significantly supporting the highimpact value of early intervention. Students without a co-morbidity made greater strides. This demonstrated that the added barrier presents a greater challenge. Pull-out instruction with teacher implemented intervention was the most effective setting and approach for progress with comprehension, fluency, and sight word recognition and pronunciation.

**The Professional Atmosphere for Teachers & Influence of Legislation & Administration**

In a critical look at the execution of inclusion practices, Bakken & Obiakor (2016) asserted that inclusion was not always executed as intended and, therefore, not only failed to support students but contributed to further damage. The researchers emphatically stated their support for the principle of inclusion, but called out areas of ambiguity, misinterpretation of laws guiding special education, and the (potentially misguided) influence of stakeholders. They argued that much of the issue could be traced to misunderstanding the relationship between the federal mandate that students receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) and the push for students to be in the least restrictive environment (LRE). Too often, inclusion in the general education classroom has been used to satisfy the call for LRE and has clouded the consideration for what type of instruction satisfies the *appropriate* aspect of FAPE for a student. As a result, more emphasis has focused on the "place" of instruction rather than the quality or effectiveness of the instruction.

The social and political atmosphere also lends its influence in multiple ways. Schools may be judged by the percentage of students with disabilities reported to be included in the general education setting. Understandably, society prefers to know that strong efforts are made to serve students alongside their same-age peers. This is especially true when the implied alternative to inclusion is "segregation" which does not provide the uplifting narrative sought by the population at large. However, Bakken & Obiakor (2016) claim this process is a disservice to students. When evaluating how and to what extent to offer inclusion, stakeholders must honestly consider the motivation behind promoting inclusion. It is critical to recognize that no boxes can be checked and the work is not done because a student is scheduled to be in the mainstream classroom for the majority of their school day. It is equally important to have a realistic view of the capability a school has to ensure that quality instruction is available to supplement and support students with disabilities in the general classroom.

Three case studies were reviewed and revealed concerning results. One factor that appeared to have contributed to the poor outcomes was the type of accommodations recommended and provided. Accommodations frequently are needed to support students who have a high percentage of daily inclusion. One problematic accommodation present in all three case studies was the ability to leave the classroom at will to instead attend a School Within School (SWS), often known as a resource room. This was rarely staffed by experienced educators and the number of times and duration of time a student spent in the room was not diligently tracked. Thus, according to the IEP the student was in their general education classroom for a certain portion of the day, a significant deviation from the schedule could have been true. Additionally, when in the SWS the student could easily tell staff they had no assignments and not receive the one-on-one instruction required to make academic progress. This

led to students who fell further behind and adopted an avoidance technique when challenging tasks were presented and they felt discomfort. Work avoidance is detrimental to students with EBD because, not only do they struggle academically, they also lack the endurance and behavioral capacity to tolerate non-preferred situations – an important life skill. This behavior was consistent in all three cases studies where work avoidance traits became permanent approaches to life. Though all students were given full credit and allowed to graduate with a high school diploma, they all experienced intermittent and unfulfilling employment along with an inability to function and cooperate appropriately in the workplace (Bakken & Obiakor 2016).

Though inclusion is a familiar topic discussed with great frequency, it's an area that lacks comprehensive research, especially as it pertains to students with EBD. Soares et al. (2022) noted that the bulk of research is centered around educators' *perceptions* of inclusion practices and is missing the key component of the effectiveness of such practices. Despite the lack of research in this area, inclusion has increased to the point where, currently, the majority of students with EBD spend over 80% of their day in the general education classroom. The combination of expanding the delicate practice of inclusion, without sufficient understanding of how to execute it constructively, has created an unproductive cycle that contributes to teachers who feel unsupported and students who are ill-served. General education teachers largely do not possess the skill set to address challenging behaviors, nor the capacity given their student ratios. Removing students remains the primary means to address behaviors. This disciplinary action achieves virtually no benefit for the student aside from an immediate reaction in the moment and, in fact, leads to further detriment.

At the helm of this misguided effort are administrators who are not universally required to receive special education training. Their knowledge is focused on legal mandates versus

effective practices. Where knowledge falls short, deficient prioritization and improper structure follow. After examining existing research, Soares et al. (2022) outlined seven barriers to effective inclusion including lack of: (a) administrator preparation and training; (b) prioritization; (c) common philosophy, vision, and mission; (d) resources and funding; (e) teacher training and coaching; (f) effective practices; and (g) effective co-teaching.

To address these barriers, four recommendations were offered, the first was to improve training in special education at both the administrative and teacher levels. This would allow administrators to better understand what resources are needed to support students with EBD in the mainstream classroom while equipping teachers with effective classroom management strategies and alternatives to exclusionary practices. The second category of recommendations targeted administrator prioritization of effective inclusive practices. Soares et al. (2022) emphasized the need for a significant shift toward co-teaching practices between general and special education teachers by combining teachers with expertise in the core curriculum with teachers who possess knowledge about effective interventions. An environment where teachers equally deliver instruction would enhance differentiation to meet student needs and provide staff support during moments of challenging behaviors. This co-teaching model, however, requires substantial *time* afforded for thorough planning, training, and progress monitoring – a scarce resource for many teachers and one which may require a shift in funding. The third recommendation offered was to fortify collaboration efforts among all stakeholders and develop a common philosophy. Investing resources to garner buy-in for a unified vision would provide the resources of the time and partnership needed to more comprehensively assess and support student readiness, ability to transition, and progress (Soares et al., 2022).

Whether the students with disabilities, or the educators selected to teach them, universal principles and progressive steps exist within the learning process. All learners appear to need some level of outside training and support to extend their skills from one level to the next. Learners also tend to advance more quickly and comfortably when the guidance includes a higher ratio of positive feedback compared to negative or corrective feedback. Though not always expressed explicitly, these parallels are evident in dialogue that recognizes the benefits of inclusion practices for students with EBD while simultaneously acknowledging that many general education teachers, especially those with limited experience, lack proficiency in managing challenging behaviors. Given these factors, feasible solutions are needed to prepare teachers to properly include and deliver instruction to students who present the greatest challenge.

It was on this basis that Garland & Dieker (2019) conducted a unique single-subject case study using three novice secondary science teachers who received individualized clinical coaching (ICC). Science was chosen because data supported the benefits of inquiry-based learning for students with EBD, provided the teacher could effectively include them. The study utilized Bug in Ear (BIE) technology as a means of providing mentoring remotely from a coach who could assist with prompts as activities were taking place. This allowed for instant tutoring, redirection, and reminders without the disruption that can occur when an unfamiliar person sits in the classroom. The format employed a three-term contingency (TTC) trial with the following component: (1) present an antecedent (i.e., opportunity to respond), (2) student response, and (3) teacher response with either praise or error correction. The study sought to answer three questions: (1) Would providing ICC to novice secondary science teachers with BIE affect the percentage of completed TTC trials?; (2) Would providing ICC to novice secondary science

teachers with BIE affect the rate of correct answers among students?; and (3) Would teachers maintain the newly learned behaviors when the intervention was removed? In many ways this echoed the same ideals of applied interventions.

Multiple initial baseline data points were collected from all three instructors capturing the number of times students responded appropriately during instruction. When teachers used BIE, an experienced mentor provided feedback such as, “provide more examples,” “be specific,” “correct the error,” and “remember to praise.” This led to documented improvement for all cases regarding student response to antecedents. Because many school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports (SWPBIS) advocate for the use of praise as an intervention (ranging from three to four for every corrective statement), this ratio was considered while guiding teachers in their feedback. Upon conclusion of the 10-session intervention, all three teachers continued using the effective practices, providing an answer to the third research question. Following suit, the students also maintained the improved response results during five follow-up observations. Participants appreciated the non-intimidating, discreet support of BIE. The study also presented a promising option for the challenging physical logistics of providing mentoring to a growing number of inexperienced teachers (Garland & Dieker, 2019).

The precursor to discussions regarding intervention implementation are discussions regarding the individuals who carry out the work, and the burnout they experience. Teacher burnout was the basis for research compiled by Gilmore & Sandilos (2023) who found a gap in available data, specifically as it pertains to special education teachers who serve students with EBD. As with any profession, job satisfaction is paramount for all individuals. There is a clear link between burnout and teachers leaving the educational field; obvious early signs of stress could be reduced or eliminated to preserve job satisfaction. Correlations have been made

between stressors in four key areas and teacher burnout: efficacy in classroom management; teacher–student relationships; role-related stressors; and cohesion with paraprofessionals. Teacher burnout occurs when a dysfunctional cycle is set in motion. The aforementioned factors not only lead to teacher burnout, they exacerbate it. For example, poor classroom management and an unstructured classroom that includes students with high rates of difficult behaviors results in an inexperienced teacher who is vulnerable to a burnout state. Due to a concerning reality that fewer teachers are entering the teaching field while great numbers are exiting, burnout is a focus well worth examining and addressing.

Because of their role in shaping the overall school culture and workload, Gilmore & Sandilos (2023) called out administrators for holding the true opportunity to positively influence the well-being of special education teachers and, therefore, provide improved services to students. They presented more recent theories from psychology as frameworks to evaluate school success at providing a balanced work environment that includes: Conservation of Resources (COR), Job Demands- Resources (JDR), and Coping–Context–Competence. COR and JDR are similar because they measure job expectations relative to the available resources to meet those expectations. When the scale is tipped noticeably in the direction of high demands, stress manifests and displays in various ways which could include a conscious or unconscious reduction in effort and effectiveness. Fortunately, this is not a problem without a solution. Administrators directly impact the work life of teachers by controlling: caseload size; sense of community among staff; the extent to which teachers are involved in decision-making; open and clear communication; peer coaching; and how well teachers feel supported when challenging situations or feelings of being overwhelmed arise.

In their research, Gilmore & Sandilos (2023) found that a disappointing proportion of interventions occurred at the individual level as opposed to in a holistic manner that would elevate the entire school climate. In addition, many teachers reported feeling ill-equipped to address the challenging aspects of their job along with feelings of isolation. Too often, the school-wide professional development provided was generic and lacked concrete job applicability. In contrast, while the stress of being an educator was real, feeling supported by administration substantially combatted inclinations to resign. Survey data from 171 special educators serving students with EBD in self-contained settings reported that administrator support was directly associated with their intentions to remain in teaching. Further, in a nationally representative sample of special educators, a one-unit change in teacher ratings of administrative support was associated with a positive change in their intentions to remain at their school and a 2.5 percentage point reduction in special educators' actual attrition.

In contrast to other bodies of research, Lanterman et al. (2021) cited 2020 data from the U.S. Department of Education stating that as recently as 2017 less than half (48%) of the students with EBD spent at least 80% of the school day in the general education classroom. While acknowledging that full inclusion was not necessary to satisfy the least restrictive environment (LRE) placement, given the myriad of individual student needs, researchers argued that a higher percentage of inclusion was attainable. They noted the distinction between simple *placement* and authentic inclusion, pointing to an adequate supply of evidence-based practices to support true inclusion. They argued that the barrier was due to perceived challenges from general education teachers related to including students with EBD. From data which suggests that access to the general education curriculum improves academic outcomes for students with EBD, along with subscribing to the principle of inclusion, 65% of the surveyed teachers endorsed inclusion.

However, only 32.3% responded that they felt sufficiently trained to effectively include students with EBD in their classrooms. Corroborating these findings, a study of 43 preservice and 36 mentor teachers resulted in positive attitudes toward the concept of inclusion, but less favorably regarding their abilities to do so owing to limited time and resources.

The ramification of insecurities about competency to serve students with EBD are interventions not executed with fidelity and a reluctance to inclusion which has significantly affected placement decisions. Rather than addressing teacher competency, EBD students have been segregated. Lanterman et al. (2021) believed that expanding the lens for instructors through enhanced teacher preparation programs (TPP) would bridge the gap between general education and the needs of special education students. Investing in training aligned with disability studies education (DSE) for general education teachers would broaden their understanding of student disability and re-shape their thinking. Teachers consider the ambiguity currently present in special education criteria that has left much to interpretation, such as exhibiting behaviors for "long periods of time" and "normal", and appreciate that social constructs have played a meaningful role criteria development.

Lanterman et al. (2021) also discovered a spectrum of teacher beliefs surrounding disability that impacted their stance on a student's capacity to grow. At one end of the spectrum is the pathognomonic perspective which accepts that a disability is inherent to the individual. Research data showed that teachers believed delivering instruction in a segregated setting was more appropriate and deferred to parents and special education teachers for the bulk of the instruction. At the other end of the spectrum is the interventionist perspective that views disability as the interaction between an individual and their environment. The interventionist takes responsibility in their role to proactively remove barriers allowing the individual access to

their education and share their unique *abilities* and contributions to society. Augmenting TPP's with DSE would serve to shift perspectives from the pathognomonic to the interventionist model and bring the true intent of inclusion for all students to fruition.

Relative to the national population of students at large, a disproportionality exists among students determined to be at-risk or eligible for special education services under the EBD category. To understand this further, Scheaffer et al. (2021) isolated how gender may impact both student-factor and teacher-factor outcomes and took an honest look at the importance of perception. On average, females make up approximately 27.5% of all students who meet EBD criteria. However, patterns in how teachers have referred students for special education services call to question the presence of perception vs. direct observational data. For example, a study of 202 kindergarten teachers found that more attention was given to disruptive behavior from boys than from girls. This contributes to why male students have reported feeling that teachers are more lenient with girls. It also presents a legitimate possibility that girls have to display more severe behaviors to be referred for services, leaving them vulnerable and not receiving the support they need.

Differences in gender tendencies have also surfaced in the way students display their behaviors and may be influenced by stage of life onset. Literature states that males have shown a propensity to express outwardly, externalizing behaviors, which includes aggression. The behaviors result in more school-based disciplinary action often followed by greater infractions post-school life. Females are more likely to exhibit internalizing behaviors, such as depression and anxiety, and covert actions that can present in the social aspects of their relationships. Despite higher negative teacher ratings for males, which lead to greater punitive actions, Scheaffer et al. (2021) reviewed observational tracking that indicated that male and female

displays of behavioral, social, or academic deficits were more similar in frequency than teachers perceived. Perceptions can influence teacher commitment to implementing an intervention with fidelity if the teacher does not trust that the intervention will be effective or does not feel confident in the student's capacity for growth.

While there is a responsibility to serve students with impartiality, it is counter-productive to deny the bias, including gender, which may be present when evaluating students. It is also crucial to acknowledge patterns that have emerged suggesting differences in how males and females display deficits and their response to interventions. Because individualized interventions are ideal, Scheaffer et al. (2021) conducted a 2-year study across 30 urban schools in Tennessee, Minnesota, and Virgina for 352 students enrolled in kindergarten through fourth grade to examine how well perceptions matched with data and to inform future instruction. The specific research questions were: 1) Do teachers' perceptions of behavioral characteristics and academic ability differ by gender for students exhibiting persistent problem behavior? and 2) Do direct observations of classroom behaviors differ by gender for students exhibiting persistent problem behavior? Counter to previous literature, teachers in the study rated female students significantly higher in problem behavior than male their students and lower in academic proficiency. However, multiple observers tracking three types of behaviors found virtually no difference between males and females in problematic behaviors with only slightly lower reading scores on assessment results. The conclusion of the study makes recommendations for further research that highlights the importance of using direct observational data when making determinations and crafting interventions which have the potential to protect students at-risk or with EBD from the destructive future so many experience.

Considering the success of inclusion, two factors pertaining to teachers' perceptions and attitudes appear to influence the outcomes immensely: expectations of and attitudes toward pupils and confidence in possessing sufficient skills and resources to manage a classroom that includes students with EBD. Documented evidence states that students with EBD in the mainstream classroom are called upon to participate less, praised less, and are given more critical feedback than their typically-developing peers. Though teachers do not directly or voluntarily express lower standards, implicit expressions exist. For example, past Implicit Relational Assessment Procedure (IRAP) results reflected a potential negative bias toward students with disabilities when trainee teachers readily paired the word "unpleasant" with the word "disabled" (Scanlon et al., 2020).

To dissect this further, Scanlon et al. (2020) conducted two similar studies that examined teachers' implicit and explicit feelings about instructing students with EBD. Both studies solicited responses related to inclusion as a general concept. They used scenarios of a student with EBD placed directly in the classroom and a student removed from another classroom and placed in their classroom, along with positive vs. negative associations with teachers and students. Both studies employed the Opinions Relative to Mainstreaming (ORM) Scale to measure self-reported sentiments toward students with EBD in the classroom as well as teacher willingness to adapt instruction to accommodate needs. Study 1 involved four groups: the control group of undergraduate psychology students; teachers-in-training with some experience working with students with EBD working two days per week; primary school teachers with over two years experience with students with EBD; and post-primary teachers with over two years experience with students with EBD. Study 1 gathered participant answers regarding students with EBD and responses to stimuli such as 'Teachers = Accommodating' and 'EBD Pupil =

Angry'. To ensure that the findings from Study1 did not reflect views toward students more broadly, Study 2 included 40 primary and post-primary teacher participants with experience and did not specify students "with EBD" in the prompts.

The findings of the studies presented these results: While all respondents expressed a favorable stance on inclusion as a concept, those feelings decreased significantly among teachers with experience when presented with the scenario including a student with EBD in the classroom and even more so when considering a student who had been removed from another classroom. Teachers-in-training replied with positive attitudes to these scenarios, displaying a lack of experience for the level of difficulty the reality represented. An unexpected result surfaced for the lack of willingness (less than half, and closer to 30%) tied to adjusting instruction to accommodate special education needs, a pillar of individualization. Participants generally demonstrated a positive bias toward teachers with a negative bias toward students, which was noticeably stronger in the case of students with EBD. All of the outcomes were consistent with previous data and greatly impacted student services. Possible solutions were presented. All participants unanimously stated that specific modifications would support the inclusion of students with EBD. Smaller class sizes, additional staff with special education training (particularly for secondary students where staff were concerned with safety), multidisciplinary involvement (including parents and prior medical knowledge), and enhanced in-service training would mitigate negative bias toward the realities of including students with EBD.

The importance of collaboration within the sphere of special education has long been understood and appreciated. It's reflected in the existence of the multidisciplinary members who pool their expertise and efforts together, along with parents, to form the IEP team. Increasingly, it is also shown in the collaboration between teachers and child service agencies (Cornell &

Sayman, 2020). What has further come to light are the significantly complex needs of children with EBD which often require intensive support beyond what the classroom teacher and school resources can provide. A number of possible reasons for this complexity include: prescription medication side-effects; mental health therapy; and episodes of crisis. The disorder may have necessitated the need for external agency support to provide what is known as "wraparound" services. Though students with EBD often experience an abundance of challenges throughout their academic lives – challenges which typically continue into the post-secondary phase – evidence revealed positive results from effective collaboration between teachers and outside agencies.

Literature is limited in grasping teacher perspectives in working with these agencies, as most research collected feedback from the administration. With this focus, Cornell & Sayman (2020) conducted a qualitative exploratory study of teachers who instructed students with EBD in self-contained or alternative settings. The interviews revealed a range of teacher experiences influenced by the quality of the agency worker, communication, and the level of involvement. Frustration was experienced when communication did not flow smoothly, when case workers heard only from students and families and appeared to be one-sided, and when partnered with an unengaged or repeatedly changing case workers. Most of the respondents, however, felt interagency involvement was an asset. On many occasions, teachers noted their role to be more cooperative, rather than collaborative, as schools are hampered by fiscal responsibility in their ability to recommend services to families. Instead, once families have accessed services on their own, the role of the teacher often changed from an information contributor to a recipient of information and recommendations. While not initially expected, the teachers reported that expanded awareness of all parties proved beneficial.

Cornell & Sayman (2020) recognized the study was limited in scope but gained some key takeaways after looking closer at teacher and interagency collaboration. First, as there are disengaged teachers, underpaid agency workers with large caseloads can be equally disengaged. Teacher collaboration training and learning how to forge optimal relationships with colleagues was recommended. Teachers also noted that positive relationships with families made it easier to establish rapport with the case-worker, as they did not hear complaints from a myopic point of view. Additional support from school social workers could help alleviate the burden of collaborating with interagencies. However, their caseloads are equally large. Ultimately, the study found that teachers, already faced with demanding jobs, were the primary collaborators. When trust and communication were established with families and the case-workers, it created the best scenario to support students.

In a review of the evolution of EBD education and legislation, Brigham et al. (2018) discussed the complexity that both Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) and Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) presented through the lens of negative and positive rights. At one time *negative* rights, which emphasized the importance of government *not* getting in the way of peoples' freedoms, was the primary concern. Later was a shift to include positive rights, freedoms and services the government should ensure people access. In this context, it was access to free public education. For those with disabilities, rights laws paved the way toward establishing FAPE and LRE.

Though the basis of this legislation was widely valued and led to greater inclusion, Brigham et al. (2018) brought forth data that the population of students with EBD continued to disproportionately lag behind their peers. Additionally, challenging behaviors made determining whether to prioritize a student's LRE or FAPE unclear for IEP teams. In fact, the highly

discouraging academic and postsecondary outcomes suggested that either the placement or instructional practices had significantly missed the mark and may have been wrongly based on trying to inflate general education numbers. The compounding effects of heightened behavioral challenges and the need for high quality instruction to overcome learning barriers found many EBD students transitioning more frequently between instructors who are ill-equipped to meet their needs. As students entered later stages of life and required more sophisticated skills, this gap became even more apparent.

Specifically, Brigham et al. (2018) highlighted four ideally developed skillsets for secondary school students that were also beneficial in adulthood: (a) discriminating essential from nonessential information; (b) recalling target information; (c) organizing target information; and (d) expressing thoughts in ways others can understand. Given this convergence of questionable placement for a high-needs population who is perpetually behind and yet, often instructed by inexperienced staff, the case was made for having a "toolbox" of effective techniques. Due to the importance of being able to understand what one has read and communicate what one knows, researchers advocated for explicit, simplified strategies that could be utilized across genres. Examples of methods that accomplish this are "Question Exploration Routine" (QER) and "Coached Elaboration" which tie in with self-regulation, self-monitoring, and goal setting that allows students to observe their own learning and contribute to the positive freedoms initially discussed.

# Chapter III

## Discussion and Conclusion

### Summary

The impetus for this research was founded on my experience as a dually-licensed teacher for third graders who have a range of special needs, including EBD. My exposure to the challenge of instructing EBD students, who required support both academically and behaviorally, motivated me to dive deeper into the available literature for effective interventions. Further adding to the context was the frustration my staff and I felt when colleagues outside of my classroom (i.e. administrators, specialists, or department supervisors) either decreased support or indicated that, because a student was successful with one-on-one teaching, they should demonstrate progress in the classroom. We observed a significant gap in understanding the frequency of challenging behaviors, despite the accommodations and supports provided. Our consensus was that a portion of the one-on-one support provided outside of the classroom would be beneficial to provide while participating in classroom activities. Because the quiet calm of an office does not mimic the classroom triggers confronting an EBD student, pull-out services cannot provide support through real-time events.

The literature reviewed sought to solve the problem of: How does the effectiveness of special education services in a pull-out only approach compare to the documented growth for students with emotional and behavioral needs who receive both pull-out and push-in minutes with regard to lasting improvement in classroom functioning? The literature reinforced my experience that, due to the coexistence of academic and behavioral needs, EBD students pose an added complexity for instructors during planning and implementation. Much of the research concurred that it is important to support students in their natural environment.

**Professional Applications**

The primary staff-led interventions were either implemented by the general education or alternative setting teachers. Examples of teacher-led interventions included: Explicit Instruction (EI), modeling and guided practice, checklists, and a high ratio of positive:negative feedback. Support from other professionals generally occurred outside of the classroom during one-on-one instruction. This includes staff in resource rooms, who were not identified as an effective means to support students either academically or behaviorally. The literature suggested that resource rooms were often used by students for work avoidance and skewed the percentage of time spent in the general education classroom (Bakken & Obiakor 2016). Additionally, resource room staff were often inexperienced and lacked the ability to fully aid students academically, contributing further to the skill discrepancy. My research effort did not find references to a combined approach. The third format of staff involvement was indirect via coaching peers in intervention implementation.

A critical component to the success of all delivery models was evidence to support effectiveness. Early intervention was noted as especially necessary. The research consistently highlighted a widening gap as students entered middle and high school if academic skills were not adequately addressed. Lagging academic skills, compounded with social and behavioral challenges, were of particular concern throughout the studies. Data also indicated that challenges often continue into adulthood and can cause devastating outcomes such as high unemployment, dysfunctional relationships, and criminal records (Farmer et al., 2016). This has created the need for interventions focused on transitioning into post-school life.

**Limitations of the Research**

Despite specifically searching for the comparison in outcomes between pull-out and push-in service models, many studies focused on approaches in restrictive settings. These studies did not align with my parameters, as my goal was to identify effective strategies to support an EBD student when remaining in the general education classroom as much as possible. As a result, these studies were excluded from my review. Other studies I excluded were those that were narrowly focused on a very specific academic skill. As a teacher, I experienced first-hand the interdependent relationship between academic competency and behavior for EBD students, and therefore fully subscribe to strengthening academic skills for behavior prevention. However, interventions related to isolated academic skills were too limited in scope for this review and also not included.

Research I was hoping to find would have presented data regarding the effect when specialists (i.e. social workers or members of a behavior support team) deliver service minutes in the classroom. In my experience, specialist support was provided either as a crisis-response or during scheduled one-on-one times. None occurred in the classroom during real time, when a student might experience the initial trigger and progress into high behaviors. While having scheduled time outside of the classroom may offer some prevention, it involved much in the way of reflection of past situations. During scheduled times, the student participates in discussing events which were either upsetting, invoked fear, or conjured difficult emotions. Alternative choices were identified and staff observed and documented the student's behaviors during future opportunities. Crisis situations prevented the responding staff from observing the antecedent(s), thus staff were reactionary in nature.

All of the literature acknowledged that classroom teachers feel overly burdened so addressing high behaviors is very challenging. Also acknowledged was that it is detrimental to remove EBD students from class resulting in interruptions in instruction. These events contribute to the student falling further behind peers and increases the number of negative experiences in their lives; there can emerge an unfortunate acceptance of experiencing "failure". Given these known consequences, I was expecting to find some research for specialist supports in the classroom as an alternative approach to address student and teacher needs.

**Implications of Future Research**

This body of research presents an opportunity to study the effectiveness of increased special education service minutes delivered in the general education classroom. I believe there are numerous possible benefits to this evolved approach. Because data tracking can provide information as to which times during the day and type of tasks that are typically *most* challenging for an EBD student, special education support could be scheduled. The professional would be positioned to observe first-hand any antecedents and be present to promptly support the student through the event. This would allow the classroom teacher to continue providing instruction to the class and, ideally, prevent the need for removal. As the student gains experience working through difficult moments, stamina would increase and trust built so students know that they are not alone. Generalizing these traits is essential and can have a significant impact on future life outcomes.

Another benefit to this approach is the modeling that will be provided to classroom staff. Staff will have the opportunity to observe how the specialist addresses the student during periods of heightened stress and while implementing the strategies used to mitigate the situation. Again, much of this coaching is accomplished during staff meetings after school using largely

hypothetical events. A specialist is present for observations while creating an FBA. A list of recommendations is generated and given to an often overwhelmed staff. Rarely does the specialist follow up to provide the support; for the teacher, it begins to feel like advice with no help. Students with trauma are individuals with a variety of needs and the response to them must also be individualized. Paraprofessionals are often not provided the training needed to sufficiently equip them for moments of significantly disruptive behaviors so removal becomes the only option. The K-12 educational approach collected data for the outcomes which provides an opportunity to investigate alternative programming methods.

**Conclusion**

Due to available research, I was not able to answer the guiding question: How does the effectiveness of special education services in a strictly pull-out approach compare to the growth students with emotional and behavioral needs demonstrate when receiving both pull-out and push-in minutes with regard to lasting improvement in classroom functioning? I feel it would behoove our EBD students and our society to devote more resources to facilitate special education service minutes in the general education classroom. It may prevent the crisis we now face of teachers leaving the educational field without well-trained replacements to fill the void. Increased support during the students' formative years would provide additional guided practice opportunities for EBD students to work through academic tasks while experiencing stress that often leads to high behaviors. Given the data indicating the adulthood experiences for EBD students, this simply must be an investment we make as a society. No longer can we "plan" to develop a targeted skill solely in sessions outside of the classroom. EBD students need the simultaneous support to address both academics and behavior in natural settings as moments of dysregulation arise organically. This is critical for students' emotional well-being and can

mitigate more of the social challenges and bullying they face. Addressing these needs at younger ages with intensified support will give EBD students greater potential to lead functional and fulfilling lives as they enter adulthood.

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